

Divine Memories

Part 4

A personal account by Pujya Mahant Swami
as he has seen and experienced
Pramukh Swami Maharaj

by
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Ahmedabad, India

Divine Memories Part 4

(A personal account by Pujya Mahant Swami as he has seen and experienced Pramukh Swami Maharaj)

Inspirer: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

From 27 November to 31 December 1995, over eight million people visited the Amrut Mahotsav in Mumbai, marking the 75th birthday of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and revealing the high regard in which Pramukh Swami Maharaj is held. To commemorate the occasion publications on his life and work were written by sadhus and devotees who had experienced his saintly and diligent life at first hand.

In reality, the lives of great souls cannot be captured in a library of words. Everyone who has attempted to bring to light different perspectives of Pramukh Swami Maharaj has undoubtedly experienced this.

To truly appreciate his divine personage, eyes of a different perception are needed. Where the world of words unquestionably proves inadequate, this venture to express Swamishri on paper can at best be only a modest attempt to portray Swamishri as he is.

Each book is only a verse in the saga of a figure who has sacrificed his entire life for the good of the society he travels in.

Divine Memories Part 4 is a translation of *Jeva Me Nirakhya Re: Part 4*, originally written in Gujarati by Sadhu Keshavjivandas (Pujya Mahant Swami). We express our heartfelt gratitude to Pujya Mahant Swami and the translator of this book, Sadhu Chaitanyamurtidas.

We hope this publication will open at least a small window into the fascinating realms of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

- Swaminarayan Aksharpath

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

The present spiritual leader of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), Pramukh Swami Maharaj, represents a succession of spirituality that began over 200 years ago in 1781. The year marked the birth of the founder of the Swaminarayan Sampraday, Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781-1830 CE).

Bhagwan Swaminarayan was born in the village of Chhapaiya near Ayodhya in North India. By the age of seven, he had mastered the study of the shastras under the guidance of his father. After his parents passed away, Bhagwan Swaminarayan renounced home at the age of 11 to embark on a 7-year, 12,000 km barefoot pilgrimage across the length and breadth of India. He observed the spiritual landscape of India, before settling at the ashram of Ramanand Swami in Loj. He received initiation from him and because of his peity and unique spirituality, Ramanand Swami appointed him as his successor. Bhagwan Swaminarayan spent the next 30 years of his life in Gujarat and Kathiawad, spearheading a socio-spiritual revival. With a faithful following of 3,000 sadhus and many thousands of devotees, he established the Swaminarayan Sampraday. He introduced innovative social reforms and undertook charitable work to help the poor and needy. In line with the ancient Vedic tradition of Bhakti Sampradays he constructed six grand mandirs. His work concentrated on promoting personal morality and moulding spiritual character.

In his own lifetime, he was worshipped as God by some two million devotees. By the time he passed away at the age of 49 he had earned a reputation as a great

socio-spiritual leader. The Sampraday he founded has emerged as one of the purest forms of Hinduism.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's spiritual presence on this earth continues through a succession of God-realized spiritual masters. The first guru in this succession was his ideal devotee, Gunatitanand Swami (1785-1867), whom he identified as the manifestation of Aksharbrahman. He in turn was followed by Bhagatji Maharaj (1829-1897).

The third spiritual successor, Shastriji Maharaj (1865-1951), established the BAPS in 1907, in consonance with the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Shastriji Maharaj emphasized the worship of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as Purushottam and Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman. He built five glorious mandirs, consecrating the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam in the central shrines and thus furthering the Vedic ideal of dual worship of God along with his ideal devotee.

The fourth spiritual master was Yogiji Maharaj (1892-1971). Through his guidance and inspiration the message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan reached across the oceans to East Africa and England. He passed away after placing the oars of the Sanstha in the hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in January 1971.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was born in the village of Chansad, 12 km from Vadodara, in Gujarat on 7 December 1921. Known as Shantilal in his childhood, he was wedded to devotion from a young age. His parents, Motibhai and Diwaliben Patel, were disciples of Shastriji Maharaj and staunch adherents of the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. Shastriji Maharaj had discerned the potential of young Shantilal from the very day he initiated him as a devotee.

At the age of 17, Shantilal received the call from guru Shastriji Maharaj to renounce. So, with the blessings of

his parents, he left home. Shastriji Maharaj initiated him into the *parshad*-fold in November 1939 and less than two months later, at Gondal in January 1940, initiated him as a sadhu. He was renamed Sadhu Narayanswarupdas.

For 11 years, Narayanswarupdas served under the guru. During the initial years, he toured with Shastriji Maharaj and studied Sanskrit and the shastras. He excelled in studies but had to discontinue them to serve in the mandirs. In 1943, he played an important role in the construction work of the new mandir in Atladra. From 1946 to 1950, he was given the responsibility of Kothari of the Akshar Purushottam Mandir in Sarangpur.

In a relatively short span of time, despite his young age and inexperience, Narayanswarupdas had coped admirably in fulfilling the duties entrusted to him and thus won Shastriji Maharaj's total confidence. In 1950, when he was only 28 years old, Shastriji Maharaj appointed him as President (Pramukh) of the BAPS in his own place. From then on, he began to be known as Pramukh Swami. Before Shastriji Maharaj passed away in 1951, he instructed Pramukh Swami to work under Yogiji Maharaj.

For the next 20 years, Pramukh Swami served Yogiji Maharaj with the same zeal and obedience he had served Shastriji Maharaj. The 1960s were a period of great expansion for the Sanstha.

Before Yogiji Maharaj passed away to Akshardham on 23 January 1971, he had revealed Pramukh Swami as his successor.

Since then, under Pramukh Swami Maharaj's able leadership and guidance, BAPS has grown as a highly respected worldwide socio-spiritual organization.

With the inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the BAPS has made noteworthy contributions to society

through its numerous social, moral, cultural, educational, medical, environmental, tribal uplift and spiritual activities.

In particular, the majestic Akshardham complexes in New Delhi and Gandhinagar have won international acclaim as centres which reflect India's ancient history and glorious culture, and inspire humanity's universal ideals.

Outside India, he has instilled fresh pride for Sanatan Dharma among all Hindus by building traditional mandirs, based on ancient Vedic architectural principles in London, Nairobi, Houston, Chicago, Toronto and Atlanta.

Also, the spectacular Cultural Festivals of India held in London in 1985 and in New Jersey in 1991 were overwhelmingly successful in relaying the timeless messages inherent in the rich heritage and culture of India.

Swamishri himself leads an austere life, without personal gains or comforts. Possessing nothing, asking for nothing, wanting nothing, he goes around giving his all. Despite his age, he travels from tiny tribal huts to modern metropolitan cities all over the world, guiding people of all ages and backgrounds to lead a life full of virtues and spirituality. At his tender word, thousands have left addictions and walked the path of God. Swamishri has inspired, never through orders or commands, but through personal example and commitment.

His striking humility, profound wisdom and simplicity have touched many. His love for mankind and respect for all religions is weaving a fabric of cultural unity, interfaith harmony and universal peace.

The sole reason behind his unique success is a deep, uninterrupted communion with God.

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PREFACE

Begin by coming just a little closer to Swamishri...

Even better, travel with him for a while...

Or best of all, become a student of his life and reflect...

Without a doubt, as you dive deeper into his personality, Swamishri will seem more and more special, more and more awe-inspiring.

You will find this is not so with other people. In most cases, we can get to know others fairly quickly. After a short time, there is nothing more left to know. And yes, all too often, come too close to a person and you will begin to expose his drawbacks and peculiarities. Hence the adage, 'Familiarity breeds contempt'.

But Swamishri is different. The closer we come to him, the more bliss we experience. One can live with him for years and years and still not know him completely. He will appear more and more novel, unique. More amazingly, Swamishri is even more than that!

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has said in his own words, "Even I cannot completely comprehend my own Glory." The situation isn't much different with Swamishri. We have heard of his virtues, we have interrogated him with our own eyes, we have experienced his proximity many times – yet, we haven't even come close to knowing him as he really is. He seems so plain and common. In fact, he's much like a tiger, perfectly camouflaged in the jungles of Bengal. Its yellow and black stripes match absolutely flawlessly with the

yellow cane and dark backdrop of the jungle. Imagine, a tiger! Such a powerful and overwhelming creature! But it is so perfectly disguised and concealed, it becomes uniform and homogeneous with the jungle. In the same manner, Swamishri has camouflaged himself in our 'jungle.' He accepts the shackles of this world, or so it appears to us. Castes and classes, traditions and cultures, family and loved-ones, eating and drinking, walking and talking, hunger and thirst, sleeping and waking, work and rest... Swamishri has willingly accepted the way of the world. But in reality, he is detached, far and above.

He has always abided by the rules and regulations of the Sampraday. But there are many others who abide by the same rules. And so, often, we count Swamishri as just one of 'them'. He looks to be a mere *sadhak*, an ordinary aspirant walking on the path of God-realization. In reality, though, Swamishri is, from time eternal, a *Siddha-purush*, always in communion and coexistence with God.

After scrutinizing his life, we gather that he has made an immense effort to reduce the vast distance between him and us. Never has he attempted to create a separate existence above and higher than us. For our sake, he has been ever-conscious not to seem too big and extraordinary. Now examine our own personal ambitions. Without a doubt, you will find our motives diametrically opposite. The thrust of our actions are aimed at becoming more and more special, more and more extraordinary; that is why we tend to become aloof and isolated. As we amplify our ambitions, the rift between ourselves and others broadens steadily. Swamishri, on the other hand, has resolved to be an ordinary human, just the way we like – always available, eternally lovable and delightfully homely.

The reason for his simplicity? After all, there is a definite and planned intent behind his acceptance of the role of ordinary-ness. First and foremost, he aims to descend to our level. How can an ant ever hope to gain affinity with an elephant? It is only when the elephant comes down to the level of an ant can they see eye to eye. Otherwise, there is no hope. He has done his part. But what are we, the ant, to do? *Atmabuddhi!* Firmly attach ourselves to Swamishri by developing intense love for him, and we have reached the end of the road to God-realization. The only suitable tool to gain freedom from the shackles of this world and attainment of Akshardham is intense and unalloyed love for the *Satpurush* – Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Secondly, Swamishri has become ordinary to make us extraordinary. Constantly delighting in the bliss of God, Swamishri aims to give the world the same bliss he enjoys. Whether we realize it or not, he intends to bestow what a true sadhu should bestow – the serenity and bliss of God. That is why Bhagwan Swaminarayan says in Vachanamrut Gadhada I-66, “A *Satpurush* who has attained God-consciousness renounces desires of worldly happiness and becomes exclusively attached to God. Such a being has only one desire, ‘May those who come into communion with me similarly renounce desires and become attached to God.’ ”

Swamishri has absolutely no interest in showing miracles or divine magic. He has never used such gimmicks to aid his work. Actually, he has never needed to! His crystal-pure saintliness has worked more miracles than any spiritual magician could ever hope to accomplish. Yet, miracles do actually occur. But he has never used them as tools to dazzle or publicize – only to give a slight push to a devotee’s struggling faith. No more.

He has remained ordinary to help us experience true saintliness, to assist us in realizing its true importance. Due to our blindness, he knows the futility of merely shedding glaring light. He has descended to our level and grasped our hands in order to lead us onwards towards Divinity. In fact, too many miracles, dazzling oratory, gaining spiritual powers tend to lead a would-be aspirant astray from the path to God. They are apt to deflect and deviate. On the contrary, the methods of a genuine sadhu are far different. Swamishri’s true aim is to free us from the fetters of *maya* and ennoble us with *Ekantik Dharma* – a heavenly harmony of dharma, *gnan*, vairagya and bhakti. By his own example, he directs us to the highest form of devotion to God. With such lofty and divine intentions, isn’t he bound to differ from the ways of this world?

What role does Swamishri play in our lives? One answer is that he is an expert at diagnosing the aches and pains of our daily life. He knows what to prescribe for which ailment; he also knows when to prescribe and in what proportion. He constantly delights in the bliss of God; but he also knows how to share with the rest of us. He shows how to make life and all its actions divine. He is a perfect sadhu. He is an ideal guru. Through his own life he has demonstrated the ideals of devotion to one’s guru. He is the ideal ‘devotee’, showing us the subtleties and intricacies of devotion to God, in its purest form. He is the house of God. He shows how to keep God. He is the leader of our Gunatit-community – the Satsang fold. He leads us to God. So great and glorious! Yet, so modest and concealed! No wonder we have failed to recognize him. He has camouflaged his identity superbly.

We have always pictured a true sadhu as one who

never mixes with people. He is typically thought of as a wanderer – always alone. He remains aloof in the jungle or in the mountains, never coming to the public – remote, isolated and secluded. His supposed simplicity prevents him from serving others, because all actions, many believe, tend to bind! Swamishri has shown us a different, much more practical picture of a true sadhu. To him, a genuine sadhu is one who has constant rapport with God. He lives within the framework of God's commands and wishes which he follows with utmost faith. His seat, instead of being situated in the snow-capped mountains, is located amongst the people, where they are most comfortable. His workplace is society and his work is worship. He works faithfully – but always for the good of others, never for himself. He works constantly amongst the people; yet he maintains the disciplines of celibacy and renouncing of wealth – firmly. Never in Swamishri will one find misuse of the intellect to search for exceptions and loopholes. These conditions help make his work divine, unblemished by corruption and deception. Actions performed in this fashion tend to free, not bind! This is the picture of perfection he has painted. When Shriji Maharaj visualized the image of an ideal sadhu, he had had a personality like Swamishri in mind. Such a sadhu is engrossed in devotion and inspires others to do the same. Such a sadhu cleanses us skilfully and imperceptibly. Even in today's rapidly changing age, he produces results by using the traditional tools of love and saintliness. With these facts in mind, we can assert that Swamishri is a genuine Sadhu.

In general, one can never judge a person from outer appearances. If that is the case, then how can we truly know Swamishri who is always trying to conceal his

greatness? By evaluating superficially, people seem alike. Whether they are great or small, rich or poor, good or evil, educated or illiterate – they all eat when hungry; they drink when thirsty; they too sleep when drowsy. All of us arise in the morning; everyone becomes ill occasionally... These are the tell-tale signs of being human. Then how can we recognize Swamishri as divine? Because try as we might, his spiritual height is such that we cannot even hope to completely sample his treasure of virtues. What shall we do? Well, although we may not recognize him as perfectly divine, we can surely experience his distinctiveness from the rest of us. In part this book will show how even his 'ordinary-ness' is unique.

In the past, all of the avatars and holy sadhus have chosen to remain silent. They had to. Their behaviour may seem a bit abnormal, but the benefits are many.

He becomes small to make us great. He becomes an ordinary explorer on the path to guide us along the path. Even today, as time has passed since his accepting guruship, Swamishri has never resorted to using his powers or using his rightful authority as a guru. He has shaded his might with a simple and steady lifestyle. But in the end, how much can he hide? As God resides in him perfectly, God shines through and shows his glory. Whether Swamishri shows it or not, God continually works through such a pure and ideal medium, thereby liberating countless aspirants from the grip of *maya*.

Even if the great scientist Einstein were to teach his son the most basic elements of language, the alphabet, Einstein would still remain a great scientist. To the unwary observer, not aware of the past or the future, Einstein may seem illiterate, stooping so low as to repeat ABC. Swamishri's actions are so subtle he would

fool even the most careful observers. He maintains absolute equality with us, yet he unlocks the gates to final liberation and shows us the light of Divinity. He sweeps clear the dirt and filth within us and prepares an elegant, divine throne on which the Lord may sit. It is only through his tireless efforts and divine grace that God can come and reside in an aspirant's heart. There is no other way.

Swamishri's character, virtues and personality are such that the aspirant is assured of redemption. Superficially, though, it may seem that Swamishri is not making an effort to redeem. Because in him, there is no show. No glamour. No hankering to make an impression. No deceit. No claims to high knowledge. No gimmicks. He works only through pure, genuine saintliness. This is his secret.

As we view Swamishri from various vantage points, we see him fulfilling many different roles. Some see him as an ideal sadhak and disciple, some as an ideal guru. Some believe him to be an ideal leader; others image him to be a matchless manager. Some picture him as a visionary guide to human harmony; others see in him the qualities of an ideal father and friend. The viewpoints are endless. But when we see him as a whole – a three-dimensional view – we see him as a genuine sadhu, the obvious address of God.

In the past, even as a disciple of his own guru, he was ideal. He concealed his greatness so masterfully! This point becomes more than evident when we hear incidents of the devotees who have worked with him during those times. Unanimously they agreed, he has always been a man of God – innocent, honest and divine.

Today, we sing his glory in countless ways, with countless words. But by far, his highest glory and

distinctive quality can be expressed in one word – his saintliness. In Vachanamrut Gadhada I-44, after explaining the qualities of a true sadhu, Shriji Maharaj states, "I am such a sadhu." Meaning, such a sadhu upholds God perfectly. Maharaj has also given an analogy showing the potency of a true sadhu, "A queen, because of her affiliation with the king, has as much authority as a king." Nishkulanand Swami has concurs in his poems, "*Sant te swayam Hari*" – a bona fide sadhu should be considered on par with God himself. Shriji Maharaj has also disclosed his own nature with the following words, "Even if the entire population of the world, including powerful kings and tycoons fall at my feet with folded hands, I would not feel the slightest pride of superiority. On the other hand, even if all my Satsangis abandon me, I would not feel the slightest dejection of inferiority. Why? Because my greatness is due to self-knowledge and devotion to God." Swamishri is very similar to Maharaj in this sense.

The basic source of Swamishri's profound bliss is different from ours. He has never turned to what the entire world has turned to for happiness – wealth, women and power. For him, God is the only goal and God is the only means.

Today Swamishri is honoured everywhere he goes. But more astounding than the extent of his eminence is the fact that he has never let honour influence him; because, after all, the famous proverb is very accurate, 'Glory is a poison that can be taken in small doses'. Although it may initially taste sweet, in reality it is poison. Shriji Maharaj has also agreed by saying, "The ego of having a large following is of a different type." Swamishri, despite having a tremendous following, has remained modest. In fact, his humility is so noticeable

and obvious that one can experience it effortlessly. Young and old alike – all have seen this quality in him and can sing of his glorious virtues with one voice. For these and many other reasons, the Satsang community refuses to leave him and go elsewhere.

The profound experience of the bliss of God is so overpowering that it pales into insignificance the enjoyment gained from praise and pleasures. Yet, when we gaze through the corridor of history, we find countless victims who have been enticed and entrapped by these two foes. Why? Lack of experience of the bliss of God leaves ample room for worldly desires to flourish. Today we can confidently assert that Swamishri is constantly enjoying the bliss of God in all its glory – an experience which is most rare in this world. Why? Because the deadly duo of praise and pleasures have failed to create even a ripple of disturbance in his inner tranquillity.

In addition to the above, countless other virtues and powers shine forth from Swamishri's magnetic personality. Self-fulfillment and contentment gained from enjoying the happiness of God make both his character and his work unique from the rest. And the lustre of his saintliness is so encompassing in his activities and overall personality that nothing else remains. From all angles, pure, pristine saintliness is all one sees. The guidance of a father, the love of a mother, the warmth of a brother, the aptitude of a leader – many have experienced these aspects as well. But even in these roles, his saintliness shines out. Why does his saintliness surface so spontaneously through each of his virtues? It is because God resides within him in all his glory and brilliance. Where there is God, there is purity, there is piety – saintliness.

Swamishri is a Param Ekantik Sadhu. In

Vachanamrut Vartal-3, such a sadhu has been compared with the geothermal fire which burns even in water, at the bottom of our oceans. The fire is fully submerged in water, yet it remains unaffected by it. Similarly, Swamishri lives in the world, yet he is untouched by its charm. The ease and intrinsic nature of his detachment, in addition to his firmness in abiding by the dictates of God is also proof of his absorption in God. Due to this fact, these otherwise hard and harsh virtues become beautiful ornaments decorating his character. Instead of becoming a burden they become gems of a precious pendant adding a divine glow to his persona. These ornaments also help remind us of the source of all beauty – God. After all, they are his blessings. The vows given by God are life-sustaining necessities, not shackles meant to restrict and bind. They are not the crushing clutches of a wrestler; they are the loving and protecting hug of a mother. They are the embrace of God.

Swamishri's view of *gnan* is not mere mental gymnastics or even verbal acrobatics. It is not breathless bickering about the fundamental nature of God. For him true *gnan* is an unbroken bondage between the soul and God.

Many years ago, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj had raised the act of enduring hardships for the good of others to a form of devotion. In fact, he often called it '*bheeda bhakti*'. Swamishri's capacity to endure hardships has been matchless. Never has, and never will a man devote himself so much for the good of others. Just as an incense stick burns itself down to its core so that others may benefit from its fragrance, Swamishri has completely sacrificed his body for our welfare. He has practically put himself at our feet! And even today, at the age of 75, despite countless health

problems, he maintains that same spirit of sacrifice and humility.

"Nane se ho nane rahie, jaisi nani doob;

Ghas fis sab ood gaya, doob khoob ki khoob."

"It is best to remain low and humble, like grass.

Because during a flood, bigger, inflexible shrubs and bushes will be swept away, while grass will remain since it bends and allows water to flow by."

This is the Swamishri I have experienced!

Swamishri has been encapsulated in a simple physical frame – as if the immense Ganga were contained in a small pot. He has made himself ordinary; this way he is much more acceptable, available and lovable.

What if the fathomless ocean were to come to us in a personified form and embrace us in person? What a miracle that would be! Swamishri is far more sublime than any ocean, and yet he has the humility to tolerate insults from insignificant beings like us... On one occasion, Swamishri was verbally insulted on the very next day after he had been honoured at the Suvarna Tula Mahotsav! By one of his own devotees! In the presence of sadhus and other devotees! They tried to stop the man's verbal abuse, but Swamishri held them back, "Let him pour out his feelings." His peaceful patience in an otherwise infuriating situation wafted a fragrance of peace throughout the room. All remained quiet and let the incident take its natural course.

"Maha re munina dhyanma na ave, te re Shyamaliyoji mujne bolave."

"The very God – Shyamaliyo – whose vision is rare even to the great *munis* who meditate intensely – has come to my level and calls me in person!"

The man who so rudely insulted Swamishri may not have known of the essence of the above kirtan. But still, even by worldly standards, offending someone without reason is not considered polite. However, let us not forget that it was Swamishri on the receiving end of those words! Any other person would have retaliated with great vengeance.

Swamishri is forever engrossed in God. Then how can praise and insult ever disturb his inner stability? In fact, his inner calm fails to allow any such outer agitation. Even outwardly we notice the same calm, peace, stability and bliss.

A true sadhu is the ideal receptacle of God. Is there anyone else in this world who can possess God like he can? For Swamishri, Sahajanand is his all. Wherever Swamishri looks, he sees Maharaj. The same Maharaj who is in Akshardham is present in every atom and particle of creation. He resides within all beings by his *antaryami* powers. And that same Sahajanand resides in every pore of Swamishri, in all his majesty and radiance.

In this book I have presented Swamishri as I have seen and experienced him. I have said a lot and yet I feel disappointed that I have not said enough. First, there are the limitations of any language. Second, there is the difficulty of expressing experiences with feeble words. Yet, I have the deep, inner satisfaction of having been able to offer loving devotion to my guru and of having portrayed him as I have experienced him...

1. A REAL SADHU!

My story begins in the year 1951. At that time my age was merely 16. On one side, the elders in the family had been staunch *satsangis* due to the grace of Shastriji Maharaj. On the other side, there was my English schooling, with all English, Christian teachers. With such a heavy western influence, obviously there was no scope of my developing any type of pride or respect for our Hindu culture. On the contrary, I was strongly influenced by their language, their traditions and their methods of discipline. The teachers constantly scorned our gods and goddesses. I remember specifically the fact that they called Hanumanji a ‘Monkey God’ and Ganapati an ‘Elephant God’. On seeing a *bawa* roaming the streets and hearing his chanting of ‘Rama Rama’, they never missed the opportunity to belittle and insult. They would point to the *bawa* and explain to us, “Look there. That is your sadhu and look at the fathers of our church.” We were so young and innocent. So it makes sense that after seeing their large churches, their discipline and the silence inside their churches, we actually believed everything they told us. Due to this type of environment, I had never come into contact with any great Indian sadhu; nor had I developed any affinity with a Hindu mandir. With the pride of youth flowing through my veins, I had never cared to. Seeing the immoral behaviour of many of the *bawas* only deepened my aversion towards Hindus. After all, they were just beggars with no other intention but to fill their stomachs. In this manner, my animosity steadily increased.

I heard later in my life that I had been lucky lucky enough to have the darshan of Shastriji Maharaj when I

was merely 6 months old. Of course I have no memories of that meeting. As Vadtal was near our home, sadhus from the old school mandir would visit often. But I cannot recall whether any sadhus came from Bochasan.

Yes, family members constantly praised the virtues of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. But, due to previous influences, I projected them onto my mind's preconceived picture of a *bawa*. So much was my bias that I actually turned down an invitation to Shastriji Maharaj's Suvarna Tula Celebrations in 1949, despite strong insistence from my relatives! It was like the body rejecting precious, life-giving blood because it came from a different blood group.

On one occasion, we were jolted by the sudden news that Shastriji Maharaj has reverted to Akshardham. Everyone, including my relatives, rushed to Sarangpur. The entire neighbourhood was deserted as faithful devotees longed to have the last darshan of Shastriji Maharaj's body. I had absolutely no desire to go, but as the home was deserted, I had no choice but to accompany them to Sarangpur. Otherwise where would I eat? I kept thinking, "What a pity; I will have to go." I felt bored and annoyed even before leaving. Without a shadow of a doubt if I had had any other alternative I would have stayed behind. When I reached Sarangpur, the cremation ceremony of Shastriji Maharaj's body had already been completed. Thereafter, everyone moved on to Gadhada for the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the final mandir Shastriji Maharaj had built. I had no choice but to accompany them. Naturally, I was completely bored and unenthused.

At such a disturbed and agitated moment, an incident with Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the night before the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony changed my life...

His age was 29 and mine 16. My life was just beginning – and I met Pramukh Swami Maharaj! Motikaka (Motibhai Bhagwandas) introduced me to

Swamishri. During the first moments I felt him to be idle and unoccupied just like me. But so powerful was that moment that I can still recall his image vividly.

He had a thick black beard just before his monthly shaving; an overall dark complexion; a soft, red spot on the tip of his nose as a reminder of his work in the hot limepits in Atladra; alert and quick eyes, rapidly blinking; a round and serene face; and since he was slim, he seemed a little taller than now. His image was so attractive my eyes refused to move elsewhere. Motikaka continued introducing us mutually, but my mind was elsewhere. The attraction was so divine that my mind felt rested, at peace. Swamishri was speaking with me in Hindi. I have absolutely no memory of what he asked or what I replied. But it felt as if he already knew me. Amazingly, I also felt I knew Swamishri!

On coming in contact with Swamishri, in just a few moments, I experienced such a divine and astonishing experience. The maxim we hear often seems so correct, "The first impression is the last impression." It felt as if I had been delivered from the unbearable, scorching heat of a hot summer's day to the crisp, rosy chill atop a mountaintop. Meanwhile, Swamishri had to leave to make arrangements for a senior devotee who had just arrived. In a flash, he left me with a soft smile on his face. I felt a bit shaken, as if some treasure had been taken away from me. There were thousands of people nearby; there was clamour and commotion due to the large crowd. And yet, suddenly, I felt alone...

With time I have come to realize how deep and divine Swamishri's personality really was – even so long ago. There was no effort to show off, no effort to glamorise, nothing of that sort. Simple, straightforward, open, and innocent. At that moment, I felt a deep, inner conviction, "Yes! This is what I call a sadhu!"

Today, 44 years later, after reflecting and pondering over that short incident I realize the sheer impact of that divine experience. Swamishri had somehow, almost magically, transformed something deep within me. This fact became more evident in the 25 years which followed...

In 1961, according to Yogiji Maharaj's wish, 51 youths, including myself, were initiated as sadhus.

During the period between 1961 and 1966 there was a group of devotees who seriously felt that Swamishri was too engrossed in outer activities and less involved in devotion. They felt he had lost spirituality as a result of that over-involvement. Not only did they feel this within themselves, but, even worse, they had started spreading gossip. These people would falsely glorify me and talk of my spiritual greatness. They would do as I say in order to win my favour. But these people had no clue as to Swamishri's greatness. And how could my mind approve of this madness? I was saved by that 'first impression.' "This is what I call a sadhu." This initial feeling and impression has grown ever-steadily; even today it is becoming steadily firmer. It is an experience and belief which comes from deep within. As a result, I have never mistaken Swamishri to be an ordinary human; I have never experienced '*manushyabhav*.' My love and devotion for him has grown steadily stronger.

Whenever those elements talked ill or gossiped about Swamishri I could not tolerate it. On some occasions I would even fight back verbally. I had also informed Yogi Bapa that these people were abusing Pramukh Swami. Yogi Bapa immediately defended Swamishri, "Who dares to talk of him like that? He has been appointed by none other than Shastriji Maharaj. Was Shastriji Maharaj an ignorant person who would appoint anyone haphazardly? As Pramukh Swami was appointed by Shastriji Maharaj, we should view him as Shastriji Maharaj himself."

In this way, Yogiji Maharaj was pleased with me due to my attachment with Swamishri and my defending his honour. This was the fruit of that first incident in Gadhada.

This one incident played a tremendous role in stabilizing me in Satsang.

Wasn't it an absolute miracle that Swamishri was able to make such a lasting impression, even when my mind was so deluded! If he hadn't, what kind of life would I be living now? What a dismal attitude I had! The subtle, ego-boosting and futile thoughts which were furiously fueling my ambitions had received a turn and transformation towards divinity.

But I am only one among thousands! Countless others have experienced such a turn of events and even more are experiencing it today. So many more are being pulled out of the pits of self-destruction and stabilized on the level grounds of Satsang.

Yogiji Maharaj had showered us with love like a parent would to a child. I became completely absorbed in his unbound affection. And it was Pramukh Swami who helped propel me further and further in this direction. He was absolutely clear in his goal. Never had he let anyone become attached to him instead of Yogi Bapa. By nature he was serious; yet at times when we met, I received tremendous warmth from him. Even if he sat silent, I enjoyed being with him. I liked Swami.

Many times activities involved in spreading Satsang appear to be similar to worldly activities. But Swamishri gave these Satsang activities a divine, spiritual touch and eased Yogi Bapa of many of his responsibilities.

By 1951, I was firmly convinced that Yogiji Maharaj was an ideal sadhu, that he was God-realized, and that the true purpose in life was to please him. That much was firm in my heart. Yet, despite my firmness and despite the fact that I

was constantly travelling with him, he had not even once asked me if I desired to become a sadhu. This was much against his nature as he would ask even newcomers, “Come. Tell me you’ll become a sadhu.”

If there was anyone who had talked to me about this topic, it was Pramukh Swami. This was the first time...

In 1951, after celebrating Janmasthan, the birth of Lord Krishna on Shravan *vad* 11, in Atladra, our group of youths had gathered at the railway station. We were to catch the morning train. It just so happened that Swamishri was on his way to Ahmedabad. All the youths boarded the train, sitting wherever they could find an empty space in the compartment. I also ran; but I ended up joining Swamishri in his third-class compartment. I was the only youth to help Swamishri and his accompanying sadhu. He was happy to see me. Slowly, the train gathered momentum. Swamishri asked me about my studies. Then, suddenly, he inquired, “Are you wearing a *kanthi*?”

I said no. Swamishri spoke affectionately, “Wait and let Yogi Bapa put it on you.”

Meanwhile, the accompanying sadhu had already given Swamishri a *kanthi* and so Swamishri put it on me. Slowly the conversation moved along. Swamishri was speaking continuously, but in broken Hindi. Casually, he put forward a suggestion, “Why don’t you become a sadhu. You’ll be able to do great *seva* in the future.” He continued his discourse filled with power and inspiration. His tone was not commanding. Nor was it one of force or compulsion. It was merely a description of the miseries of worldly life and of the bliss of God and guru.

His unimposing style was such that I felt the choice was left to me. His tone was so sweet, loving and humble that in the end, an absolutely new direction had opened up in my life. I felt at peace. It was after this incident that an inner, secret desire to choose the path of a sadhu awakened within me.

After a short while, Swamishri began explaining the wonderful virtues of Yogiji Maharaj. Hearing these talks, I felt such bliss and warmth that it was as if Swamishri had taken me, his child, in his lap. In this manner, Yogiji Maharaj’s greatness began settling in my heart.

Inside the train, passengers were passing back and forth along the aisle; there was commotion, the rhythmic rattling of the boxcar, soot flying from the engines... but the conversation felt so pleasant that I failed to realize that the Anand station had already arrived. The other youths who were to depart at Anand had already left their own compartments and had gathered around Swamishri. Swamishri lovingly met each one. His journey was to continue onwards to Ahmedabad. After giving his last words of inspiration, Swamishri said with a soft laugh, “Today is Ekadashi. Don’t forget to observe it by fasting...” The youths agreed and departed as the train had started moving again.

As Swamishri had not specified which type of fast to observe, for the first time in my life I took on the difficult challenge of observing a waterless fast. If I had desired to eat, there were plenty of *farari* items available in the house. But, thinking of Swamishri’s wish, I decided to attempt a waterless fast. I barely made it through the day.

Fifteen days later, Yogi Bapa was visiting our hometown, Anand, on the day of Ekadashi. We had decided to do a *farari* fast, but on the previous night, Bapa asked me, “Do you observe the Ekadashi fast?” In our spontaneous enthusiasm, we informed him of how fifteen days ago we had observed a waterless fast due to Pramukh Swami’s wish. As fasting was his favourite topic, Bapa was more than elated. Then, he gracefully seized the golden opportunity and announced his wish, “Try a waterless fast tomorrow as well!” Although these words felt bitter, the youths were gripped by his love. In this manner, by Yogi Bapa’s wish and Pramukh Swami’s initial push, I began to regularly

observe Ekadashi fasts without even drinking water.

More and more, I began to see Swamishri as a pure, genuine sadhu. The more I saw, the more I believed. Today I am sharing these experiences which have been so deeply carved into my memory.

In those days, even Swamishri observed waterless fasts. During the four months of monsoon, he would also observe the *dharna-parna vrat*. The fasts were physically taxing, yet Swamishri's face never displayed even a sign of weakness. So much work! So much travelling! So many people came to meet him! Yet, on the mornings following a fast, he always insisted on having the darshan of the Lord during the *shangar arti* before breaking the fast. Even during such strict austerities, his nature remained mild. Maybe that is why even today, thousands of people from all over the world – young and old, men and women – find inspiration from his life and follow the various vows and observances of the Sampraday. His sadhus perform even more difficult austerities in order to please him. This can only be possible through genuine inspiration. Showmanship can never produce such lasting results in so many people at the same time – further proof of Swamishri's genuineness.

In this manner, my life had begun to be moulded by Swamishri's affectionate words. The incident in the train was not ordinary. I had never even thought of becoming a sadhu; and even Swamishri had not talked with a purpose of convincing me. All of the pieces fitted together so naturally. Such a lofty and difficult-to-reach ideal – a sadhu's life! Renouncing all our loved possessions! Yet Swamishri's brief and casual talk had convinced me that it was the best path to realize life's ultimate goal. And Swamishri was conversing in Hindi – grammatically poor Hindi. He had difficulty in expressing his ideas; yet imagine the power of those broken words! They penetrated into the deepest core of my heart.

Only a genuine sadhu could have created such an impact.

d d d

Summer vacations and Diwali holidays meant Yogi Bapa. Wherever he happened to be, youths ran to him like arrows shot from a bow. Our love and attachment towards him was so strong that we were ready to do any *seva* he commanded. We observed fasts. We made do with whatever meagre facilities we got, whenever we got them. Normally, all of this would seem very bitter for a youth, yet we accepted the hardships with smiles on our faces. The only reason was that we wanted to earn the grace and love of Yogi Bapa. In reality, none of us were interested in fasting, listening to discourses or performing strenuous *seva*; yet, we were motivated simply by a deep craving to please Bapa.

Once, during one of these vacation periods, I happened to be travelling with Yogi Bapa in Petlad. We were residing at the house of Bhailalbhair of Bhadrans. Mota Swami and Pramukh Swami were also accompanying Yogi Bapa. At that time we received the sad news that one of our staunch devotees, Kuberbhair of Bhavnagar, had passed away to Akshardham. On hearing the news, Yogi Bapa immediately started chanting the Swaminarayan *dhun*. Bapa then made arrangements to go to Bhavnagar to perform the last rites and told me, "You remain with Pramukh Swami and serve him. We will meet again later." I agreed.

On the same day, Swamishri travelled to Ahmedabad with his accompanying sadhu. Of course, observing Yogi Bapa's wish, I went along. The three of us stayed at the small mandir in Ambli Vali Pol. This was the very mandir where Shastriji Maharaj, with profound foresight, had made the young, 28-year-old Narayanswarupdas the president of the Sanstha. From then on Swamishri popularly came to be known as 'Pramukh Swami'.

When we arrived, I met the *kothari* of the mandir,

Babubhai Somnath, for the first time. Although he had great attachment for the Sanstha, it seemed he was quite miserly. So much so that he gave even essentials such as flour, ghee and other cooking ingredients very hesitatingly. But Swamishri, instead of becoming upset, was content with whatever the *kothari* handed out. Swamishri would prepare our meals himself. Somehow, he had come to know that I have a preference for *rotlis* instead of rice. So daily he gave me his own share of *rotlis*, even though we had to make do with a limited supply! He was content with other items such as *dal* and rice. In addition to all of this, he would spread all of the ghee on the *rotlis* so that I would find them more palatable, leaving none for himself. He worked so subtly and silently that I never came to realize he was sacrificing so much for me. As I was young, I had a mighty appetite. Yet, my dilemma was that I felt a bit shy to ask for more; I felt very constrained. But Swamishri's love was such that it broke through all barriers. With untiring affection, he would continue to serve me until I felt content. I didn't even have the common courtesy to inquire if there was anything left for Swamishri! Truly, even today, I relish the boundless and selfless love he showed. His has been a steady stream of love which continues to flow unceasingly to this day.

d d d

Once, Yogi Bapa was visiting Bhavnagar, but he had instructed me to accompany Pramukh Swami to Ahmedabad. It so happened that Swamishri had to move from Ahmedabad to Atladra. As I was still a *yuvak*, I was to help make suitable seating arrangements in the train, keeping in mind the sadhus' discipline of avoiding contact with women. After boarding, Swamishri took his seat but soon got up to search for seating which would be more suitable. Before leaving, he instructed me to remain seated where I was. He returned a short while later and said, "Let's go. I've found better seats ahead." He carried his own *potlu*

and I followed him to the other compartment.

The question is, Who was responsible for making the seating arrangements? Swamishri or I? In reality, the guru became the servant!

We settled down comfortably in our new compartment when suddenly Swamishri queried, "Where is your bag?" I realized that in the mad rush, I had carelessly forgotten it in the previous compartment. I remained silent, still wondering. Before I even got around to getting up, Swamishri, without saying a single word, dashed off in search of my bag. The train was about to depart from the station; and the crowd was so dense that Swamishri was in full danger of being touched by a woman and thereby would have to observe a fast. Yet, in a short while, Swamishri returned with my bag! At that time I was a proud teenager of 17; I was sent along with Swamishri to serve him. Yet, he took care of me like his own child. I was dazed by the fact that after all the commotion, he never uttered a single word. Although it was my own responsibility to care for my own luggage, there were no "be-more-mindful" words of disapproval. Nothing! Not only did he not express it, but he did not even let such a thought enter his mind. How strange! Undoubtedly, I had committed a mistake; yet he managed the situation so tactfully and lovingly that I felt no pain. He had showed me how to behave without even uttering a single word!

As the train began to move, Swamishri commenced reading letters – as if nothing had happened... I could only stare in absolute amazement...

Who wouldn't love such a sadhu? Even today, I can recall this incident vividly and effortlessly. The more I contemplate on it, the more I learn. My love for him grows. And his unceasing flow of love and care for me still continues to bring tears of joy to my eyes.

Now, the question I ask myself is, Why so much love and

concern for me – without any justification? He should have expected me to care for him. In fact, I had been specifically sent to Ahmedabad with him to serve him. Instead, he ended up serving me! How paradoxical! The guru became the servant and cared for my needs. Was his popularity going to increase by serving me? Not likely, since no one else knew of the incident. Was he going to gain anything else from me? Not likely, since I had nothing to give him. So many other youths like me were ready to serve him; he had only to ask. But this was Swamishri's technique of love. He believed all of us to be Yogi Bapa's; so he served us like he would serve Yogi Bapa.

One who is truly considerate of others' needs must first forget his own bodily comforts. True, Swamishri has shown love and care for all. But my own personal experiences show that his love is of the highest quality – indescribable by words alone. It is not a topic of discussion, but a subject of experience. Only experience allows us to comprehend it fully.

In 1983, after receiving the tragic message that Swamishri had suffered a heart attack, I rushed to Vadodara to meet him. Even though he was undergoing complete bed rest and was still suffering from weakness, he worried about my accommodation. He told the attendant sadhus, "Mahant Swami has arrived. Make sure you serve mung beans in his meals."

He had also given similar instructions to take care of Pujya Doctor Swami and the other doctors who had arrived. No matter how brave a man may be, during such difficult and trying circumstances, he would not think about anyone but himself. It is only possible with limitless love and a selfless feeling of attachment.

d d d

Whenever I look at Swamishri I always recall how he has completely worn down his own body in serving others.

His sacrifice has been matchless. I always seem to feel that we have done absolutely nothing for him in return. Absolutely nothing! I have travelled with him visiting devotees' houses, both in India and abroad. Everyone wants to meet Swamishri. Everyone throws the burden of their problems, complaints and inconveniences on him. All responsibilities are flung onto his shoulders. This means he is forced to endure both physical and mental hardships. So many strange people, thoughtless people as well – they all come to Swamishri. Many come to claim their rights; but none to exercise their duties. If we were to label these hardships, we would call them 'a nuisance.' Responsibilities of handling his own sadhus, as well as his householder devotees. Responsibilities of managing the Sanstha as a whole. Responsibilities of keeping everyone happy and satisfied. Day and night, well or ill, winter or summer – no matter what the situation – he is forced to continue with his busy activities. No holidays! No vacations! Just thinking about the burdens brings a hair-raising chill down our spine. His ability to manage has never ceased to amaze.

If we examine the last twenty-five years of his life and consider the hardships he has endured under extremely difficult circumstances, we won't be able to find a single person who has tolerated more! Both in Satsang and outside.

I can still recall the travelling Swamishri did in Bamangam. The hot summer month of Vaishakh. A typical, scorching hot Indian summer's day. Swamishri was sanctifying the devotees' houses at the time of day when the heat is at its peak – three o'clock in the afternoon. I was accompanying him to the various houses. The hilly terrain of the village didn't help make *padhramanis* any easier. The climb up was physically taxing to say the least.

I can still remember that on one instance Swamishri was climbing up a hill. The physical strain was made apparent by the sound of his heavy breathing. It also seemed that the

soles of his feet were paining him. I felt such pity for him. 'Why does he tolerate so much of his own accord? Now he should rest...' I thought. Suddenly Swamishri looked up at me and gave a soft smile. My mind immediately questioned, 'Is this a laughing matter? Your physical body is being consumed and exhausted and you can laugh about it?' The question had not completely formed in my mind when Swamishri revealed his secret, "Did you know Yogi Bapa has visited every corner of this village!"

What could I reply? How could I reply? His sights were constantly fixed upon his guru. His only desire was and is to use all his energies to please his guru. As a result, he has kept absolutely no pity on his body. He has continued working as a man without any personal desires. My own personal experiences with him tell me that he has always and will always continue to serve every single person in Satsang without a single thought of bodily comfort.

He has tolerated verbal abuse in order to receive a mere 2 kg of *dal* in donation. In Vasad, on the day of Ekadashi, Swamishri visited the homes of over 122 devotees, despite having a fever and while observing a waterless fast. My presence with him on that day bears witness to the hardships he has tolerated.

Once we had left Sarangpur to go to Atladra in an old, battered Desoto car. Swamishri was travelling especially to meet a relative of Ramanbhai Sheth who was going to settle in America. In order to see the devotee off, Swamishri postponed the opening of the village water tank in Sarangpur. Little did we realize the troubles we would experience during our journey. Immediately after departing from Sarangpur, from Khambhda only a few kilometres away, we had to begin pushing the car! The journey had only begun! The scorching heat of the peak-summer's sun didn't make matters any easier. Finally, after a long, tiring journey, we reached Atladra; but whatever spirit we had left

was drained by the news that the devotee had already left for Mumbai. Swamishri's long journey had been pointless! Nonetheless, his mood was not at all affected! Swamishri, in order to fulfil his previous appointment in Sarangpur, returned at ten in the morning after resting only four hours at night in Atladra. There he attended the opening ceremony of the water tank. So much trouble just to meet one devotee before his departure to a foreign country! Where else can we find such motherly care and concern in this world?

In Koorduvadi, Maharashtra, Swamishri visited devotees' houses even at 3.30 am. Once in Benares, I accompanied him for *padhramanis* – in the pouring rain; in a cycle-ricksaw. The rainfall was so heavy that the gutters along the road became unnoticable due to the deep puddles of water. Suddenly, one of the wheels of the ricksaw fell into a gutter hole and became bent due to the weight. Without hesitation, Swamishri pulled up his dhoti to his knees and started to walk in the deep water and pouring rain. The youth who was holding an umbrella over Swamishri was carrying it in such a way that a steady flow of water landed directly on Swamishri's shoulders.

But these hardships must seem insignificant to him compared to what he tolerated in the scorching limepits in Atladra at the young age of 18. Even in those days he was a matchless figure. From the beginning, Swamishri's divine virtues have continued to echo in my mind.

Let's think... When someone tolerates so many hardships – voluntarily; when someone offers pure devotion to the Lord – selflessly; when someone is resolute in observing the vows and disciplines of the faith – unfailingly... Would such a person ever need to give advice to people verbally? Much more than words, his actions and character create an everlasting impression in people's minds.

We too should learn from Swamishri's life. After all, "He

who does good to me, teaches me to be good.” Let’s cultivate a pure character. Let’s begin to show genuine care for others. Swamishri has always tolerated hardships in order to please others. He has served others. He has won people’s hearts with his open lifestyle. In fact, through Swamishri’s life we can see the sheer magic which a combination of love and character can create. He has taken the concept of benevolence to the extreme by serving even his own ill-wishers – not just once in a while, but constantly and with the same affection. Even after 25 years as a guru, he has continued to serve others. He has completely sacrificed and dedicated his body for the benefit of Satsang.

Even though he has, without doubt, worked hard, in his mind he continues to feel that he has done nothing. Although his health is failing due to old age, he continues to toil, disregarding all bodily comforts and necessities. In fact, sometimes our minds doubt, “Does he really have a body?” For him the only definition of rest is strengthening Satsang. If this wasn’t so, he would not be able to become our *sevak* and continue to sacrifice his entire life for our sake.

Once in Sarangpur, during a quiz programme, the sadhus questioned Swamishri, “What would you like to become?”

Swamishri replied, without even a moment’s hesitation, “*Sevak!*”

He has always remained a *sevak*. He has never demanded his rights; instead, he has always acted on his duties and responsibilities. He believes his duty to be his only right and gains enjoyment from fulfilling his responsibilities. For this reason, he has never experienced boredom, laziness, weariness. This is why he has always remained light and tensionless.

My writing about Swamishri’s capacity to tolerate shouldn’t be considered a formality; nor is it merely a narration; nor is it an emotional flight; nor is it a flashy

display of love. These words aren’t just well-chosen adjectives to describe Swamishri’s life. Neither am I writing because I should be compelled to write about my guru. What I have described is not an exaggeration; nor is it over-generalisation. What I have written are facts planted firmly on the foundation of personal experience. Of course, thousands of devotees can bear witness to these same experiences. To my mind, he has toiled so much that in the future incidents narrating the difficulties he has tolerated will be thought of as tales or fables.

His life has shown that there is no limit to the amount of hardships one may undergo for the benefit of society. No limit! Even to this day, not only has he refused to stop, but he has refused to even slow down!

We are all familiar with the proverb, “You hear, you forget. You see, you remember. You do, you know.” These words call for much thought. We may listen well, but we tend to forget words. Better – if we see it with our own eyes, we will remember. Best of all – go through the experience ourselves and we truly know what it is like. Observe one waterless fast on a hot summer day and you will know what it is like to fast. Lectures, seminars, books and elaborate descriptions can never substitute for personal experience.

In the same manner, instead of hearing verbose descriptions of Swamishri’s life of travelling, accompanying him for a few days will paint a much better picture of the accompanying hardships. But even that will only be a few days’ experience, not years and years of constant travelling! If that is the case then how can others truly understand by merely reading words? He has not taken leave or gone for a vacation for the last 25 years of his life – not a single day or even a single hour! For years and years he has toiled and persevered relentlessly, for our welfare. The strain has only now begun to show in his ailing health. Hardships within hardships within hardships! Living only one day in his shoes

would be enough to plunge us into deep insanity. And yet see how serene, carefree and light he remains.

Before a wooden flute can produce its soft, enchanting music, the original wooden stick must first be hollowed and pierced. Swamishri is producing beautiful music through his life; but first he endured and tolerated countless hardships. We would not be able to repay him for his favours even if we were given millions of births. One may argue, Don't the people travelling with him also undergo the same hardship as Swamishri? But there is a vast difference between the two. Intentions, attitudes and aims are different from the root. Swamishri's approach is purely divine.

So the question is, What is the driving force which allows Swamishri to behave in this manner? The answers may lie in Swamishri's approach and attitude...

- He never forgets the sacrifice of the devotees. He always speaks with pride of their commitment and dedication to Satsang.
- He truly believes that he has done nothing. Only his gurus are responsible for whatever success he has achieved.
- He sees God and his gurus in all of his devotees. He serves them as he would serve God and guru.
- He never thinks of spending time for his own self; all his thoughts are devoted for the good of others.
- Most importantly, he wants to give us the bliss of God.

These are his secrets. This is why he remains so free. Otherwise, anyone else in his place would quickly become exhausted or even frustrated. If not that, they would definitely complain. If they still continue working, it would most probably be for some selfish motives.

On the other hand, we can see constant divinity and selflessness in Swamishri. Otherwise no matter how much you pay a man, no matter what you give him, no matter how much you praise him – give him all he wants – still, no

one would be willing to wear Swamishri's shoes. This is the Swamishri I have experienced.



2. SHARING THE BLISS OF GOD

By 1955, I was well-acquainted with Satsang and many of its concepts were firmly rooted in my mind. I had developed strong affinity with the Satsang community – youths, devotees, sadhus and of course, Pujya Yogiji Maharaj, the very heart of Satsang. Also, as I had gradually cultivated an inner desire to become a sadhu, I slowly lost interest in studies and other worldly pursuits. Yet, it was Yogi Bapa's wish that I complete my studies. So, postponing my longing to become a sadhu, I attended college, but only as a formality, coming and going as if it were nothing more than a chore which must be performed. I had lost interest in studies and sometimes would even talk to others about becoming a sadhu. My relatives constantly annoyed me about my decision. I was desperately struggling to escape from their grip over me. They constantly pressed me to give up my hopes of becoming a sadhu and choose a married life instead. I felt trapped. There I was in a college environment – immoral company, pointless conversations, parties and many times even amorous gossip. It felt very nauseating.

With these disturbances agitating my mind, it so happened that once, our group of final-year college students was to take part in a tour for a research project. Obviously, as it was a trip from college, males and females were to travel together. The question burning in my mind was, How do I keep myself as aloof as possible so as to avoid contact with the female students? During the last fifteen days I was absolutely fed up with the situation. A deep desire to have the darshan of Yogi Bapa burned within. But looking at the circumstances realistically, I

realized that that was not possible for at least another month. I longed for Satsang as a farmer longs for the monsoon rains after a long, dry summer.

Then, an unexpected incident gave hope...

One day, while we were awaiting a train at the Surendranagar station, I saw a familiar figure departing from a train. Pramukh Swami! He was carrying a pillow under one of his arms and his other hand held a small *jholi* containing his *pattar*. My heart was so elated to have his darshan that I felt peace in every pore of my body. In his typical style, Swamishri was walking briskly. I have always adored his bold and confident walk. I quickly caught up with him and bowed down with delight. Swamishri was happy to see me. He asked where I was going, and after a brief chat, gave me his blessings. Many times he laughed in his enthusiasm to talk to me.

I had previously heard from Motikaka many heroic incidents exhibiting Shastriji Maharaj's bold and spirited personality. Many times he would become so engrossed in telling us those incidents that we failed to take heed of time. Often, the talks lasted all night. On that day at the Surendranagar train station, I immediately recalled Shastriji Maharaj's bold character on seeing Pramukh Swami. "Shastriji Maharaj must have had a similar lion-like persona," I thought to myself. During those early days, in my ignorance, how could I possibly have realized why I saw the similarity?

At a moment of desperate mental anguish, a brief incident with Swamishri had become an overwhelming relief. I didn't get the darshan of Yogi Bapa that I had longed for, but Pramukh Swami's darshan had the same soothing effect.

As I recall this incident, I feel that Swamishri has always kept many of his virtues hidden. His bold, carefree walk, free of all bodily concerns. His innocence. His purity.

I can still vividly recall those precious, nostalgic moments.

I bowed to Swamishri and in a quick flash, he went along his way. As our train departed, my eyes remained glued to Swamishri's receding image as he and his accompanying sadhu departed from the station...

d d d

Three to four years ago, when Swamishri was at the Bochasan mandir, C.M. Kaka (C.M. Patel of London) phoned from London. At that time, work for the new marble London Mandir had just begun. After giving a brief report of the progress, C.M. Patel joked with Swamishri on the phone, "Bapa! You'll have to work a miracle if you want the Mandir completed on time."

Swamishri laughed and replied, "You don't need miracles – only sweat!"

Examine this incident and you will see a unique aspect of Swamishri's personality. That is, he has never stressed miracles. Think over the incident a little deeper and we realize that he is not concerned with either displaying worldly greatness or becoming famous in the worldly sense. After all, isn't that why people generally use miracles? Swamishri's glory is eternal, he has not become great. He has always been perfect. He enjoys the bliss of God, infinitely, constantly and absolutely. Not only does he enjoy that bliss, he also shares it with others. Not only has he described that bliss to others, but he has also given a taste of it to countless people in the world. He has directed all of us in the direction of peace, happiness and joy. He hasn't given fleeting moments of cheap miracles – he has given the solid experience of bliss.

Have the great devotees of the past like Mira, Narsinh, Surdas, Tulsidas or Kabir, ever resorted to using miracles? Did they have to fly through the air? Did they ever bury themselves alive underground? Have they walked on fire? Have they ever showed *kumkum* magically emerging out of

their hands? Yes, Swamishri has worked many miracles in his life, but they have always been considered secondary. It is his life, his devotion and his love which people remember, not miracles. If we define a sadhu as a person who shows miracles, then our definition is faulty from its very root. Sainthood is not a tool to be used to trick or fool people. The greatest and most beneficial miracle in life is to enjoy the bliss of God day and night, and to make countless others a part of that bliss. Swamishri is a sadhu, not a magician.

I have been associated with Pramukh Swami Maharaj for the last 44 years of my life. I have truly enjoyed his company. Without a shadow of a doubt, I have experienced that Swamishri is a pure and genuine sadhu, far different from the rest.

His virtues have not been cultivated, nor have they been obtained. They have not been learned, nor have they been discovered. It is not as if he has become virtuous by being carved and shaped like a statue. His virtues are eternal! He has an everlasting and eternal association with God. That is why he is a haven for all virtues.

With so much goodness bundled into one person, he is bound to have spiritual powers. In fact, his mere speaking creates results. But Swamishri doesn't desire to misuse these powers by joining people to the worldly path. He doesn't want to give artificial and temporary happiness. Only a false sadhu would do that. Such a sadhu would hanker after pleasures to please the body and would lead people onto the same fruitless path. A sadhu who is entrapped can only trap, never free. What a vast difference between such an alloyed sadhu and Swamishri!

If there is one aspect of Swamishri's life that shows its uniqueness immediately and without any effort, it is his steadfastness in observing the sadhus' *panch vartmans* prescribed by Shriji Maharaj. In every aspect, his has been a constant and steady lifestyle – from the beginning! He has

travelled far and wide, both in India and abroad; yet, he has always strictly observed the sadhus' vows steadfastly. An organization, a society or a country which acts according to the standard disciplines, is, firstly, guarded from degradation. Secondly, it grows outwardly. Thirdly, it is strengthened internally. In a sense, it becomes fearless. Shriji Maharaj has given disciplines for sadhus in the form of the *panch vartmans* – *nishkam*, *nirlobh*, *nisswad*, *nissneh* and *nirman*. A life lived, both physically and mentally, within these boundaries becomes absolutely free of fear and worry. One is so well-protected by thier shield that even the most hideous inner enemies of man, such as lust, greed, ego, anger and jealousy, cannot cause one harm. Of course, Swamishri has no lust or greed or ego or anger or jealousy to worry about. But imagine the benefits for us!

If these *panch vartmans* are followed sincerely then there would be no need for one to turn to hypocrisy or deception. With deception, one lives a tension-filled life, constantly having to worry about concealing one's true nature. It may seem paradoxical, but he who is bound by these *panch vartmans* is free in the truest sense of the word! One who is free, then, is bound to be free of pressure and tension. Only through such a sadhu can we ever hope to realize true freedom.

In the end, the ease which Swamishri experiences from saintliness, from seeing good in all, from equanimity in all situations can only be due to the fact that he experiences the bliss of God.

Many people tolerate only to show saintliness, but in reality their hearts remain heavy. They may tolerate without uttering a single word, but deep inside they feel hurt. Many times a person may not be able to reply due to meekness, but he still feels bruised. Such plastic saintliness only creates additional burdens and tension.

Of all the inner enemies, ego is the most hideous. Its

effects can be seen all around us in many forms, but the stress and anxiety which accompanies it can seldom be seen. Swamishri has completely conquered this 'I-ness' and is well-reposed on the peaks of humility. That is why he is completely free of fear and anxiety.

"The deepest craving in a human being is to be appreciated." All perversion of a man's base instincts have their roots in ego. Without recognition a man remains constantly distressed. He feels lost, without direction. Moods come and go. He fumes like a half-burnt log.

Many times, a man cannot become a man and show appreciation to others. The real tragedy is that many times even showing appreciation doesn't ease our tension. It is only if that appreciation is given with genuine love and concern that we feel at peace.

Judging from the plight of the common man, we begin to understand the spiritual height at which Swamishri soars. He has never hesitated in showing appreciation. In fact, he has always taken every opportunity to praise and compliment. The reason? He is able to accept the greatness of others with joy.

Some people show modesty to gain attention. Hollow humility! Some people become humble merely to be more social. Conditional humility! This type of fake humility can never bring peace of mind. Swamishri's humility, though, is so genuine that even words cannot describe it fully. Yet, even without comprehending it fully, we can see its effects all around us. In the end, his humility can only be experienced, not described by fancy words.

The Swamishri I have experienced is Narayan's *swarup* – the very form of Narayan. His bliss is a matter of experience. It is something to be relished, not merely described, defined or dated. Why? Because bliss is more of a mental state than a physical condition. In fact, we cannot even begin to talk about the highest type of bliss – that of

atma and Paramatma. The topic itself is beyond the senses and the mind. Swamishri has experienced that bliss from eternity. Think of the difference between being a millionaire and becoming a millionaire. The one who is, enjoys. But for the one who is becoming, happiness is still far away. Swamishri is and always has been; he is not becoming.

A scientist may conduct many studies on milk and write thousands of pages on the topic; yet, it is the illiterate cowherd who enjoys the delicious milk. Who will be nourished more? The one who studies or the one who drinks? Of course, the one who drinks the milk! In the same way, while others merely talk of God, Swamishri is enjoying the bliss of God. For him, the bliss is not a matter of mere speculation – it is real and actual experience.

Due to the lashes of *maya*, our *jivas* have been scarred with ignorance, hatred, jealousy and the constant pulling of ‘I-ness’ and ‘My-ness’. Take any pleasure of this world and it is bound to be tainted with the miseries of *maya*. Still, we create mountains of misery by chasing after those pleasures. This constant, mad chase has weakened and depressed our *jivas*. How, then, can we expect to see true happiness and peace within Swamishri? Even if we do see, we don’t believe. What a pitiful state!

Once, a great Sanskrit scholar had come to meet Yogiji Maharaj. He had written six books on a wide range of topics, including, *The Bliss of God*, *The Existence of God*, and *Research on God*. The books had also gained wide popularity in India. Yet when Yogi Bapa requested him to deliver a lecture in front of an assembly, he seemed quite weary and depressed. He spoke in a dejected voice, “Where is God? Who has seen him?...” Now what shall we call his books? Merely an exercise of his pen or something else? Professional writers can write pages and pages on a wide range of speculative topics, without any personal experience. They can fill pages, but they cannot fill their hearts. They remain hollow, being

more than satisfied with their meagre wages for their effort.

In this sense, inner saintliness is miles ahead of outward intellect. To be able to experience that inner bliss, we have to go to Swamishri!

Once in Gondal, Swamishri was discoursing the Swamini Vato (Gunatitanand Swami’s spiritual teachings). In the talk, he said, “Whoever has found God and his Sadhu is truly lucky.” He then pointed to a devotee from the village of Kheralu named Virchand Modi and said, “Look at our Virchand Modi... He is always in ecstasy. Ever since he found Yogi Bapa, he has experienced immense joy and happiness. By worldly standards he is poor; in fact, he has struggled to build a home of his own. Yet he tell us, ‘Swami! Make a mandir out of my home so that everyone can benefit.’ Never has he come to us to tell his woes. He has realized that to have found God is the greatest fortune in the world. He has realized this deep within his heart and hence his boundless joy. Ramanbhai Sheth of Ahmedabad also has the same understanding.”

Swamishri has shared the sublime bliss he experiences with countless devotees, and this has made him even more happy. He has only one wish, To distribute the happiness which he himself enjoys to the rest of the world.

Swamishri is Akshar. The bliss of Akshar is of the highest calibre. True, an aspirant experiences higher levels of bliss as he progresses on the spiritual path. But it is only when one reaches the level of Akshar that one experiences the bliss of God in its perfect and unparalleled form.

An ordinary man on the street experiences happiness from even worldly objects and petty pleasures. But one can gain a little more happiness from talents, and even more from developing virtues. The source of this temporary happiness? Ego. Pride. Even higher than the happiness gained from pleasures, talents and virtues is the high of gaining spiritual powers. But even higher than that is the

contentment gained from becoming desireless. And even higher levels of happiness exist... Gunatitanand Swami has said, "Higher than the happiness of *maya* is the happiness of the *atma*; but the highest of all is the happiness of God." Of all the levels, this Gunatit state is the most prized.

From Swami's words we can gather that the bliss of the Self is not ordinary. Swamishri is Akshar, so the bliss he gains from his own self is extremely great. For this reason, Swamishri is self-content. But even more importantly, he is content because he has God.

An example may clarify the concept farther. Two attractive people, although each has beauty, are attracted to the other. Each enjoys the other's beauty. Similarly, Swamishri has the beauty of desirelessness, of lofty virtues, of being Akshar. But he sees even more beauty in God. He is constantly enjoying that happiness. And because he enjoys it, he can share it. That is his principal aim for coming into this world. That is why Swamishri pointed to Virchand Modi in Gondal.

If we examine the incidents in his life, it seems that he has never forgotten God, nor has he ever made God secondary. This fact is ample proof of his devotion, his faith, his humility and his complete surrendrance to God.

Once in Sarangpur, while Swamishri has having his breakfast, Brahmadarshan Swami asked, "Bapa! Two days ago I mentioned in *katha* that Swamishri has 'no value' without Maharaj. Many sadhus were displeased with my remark. So please tell us the truth out of the bottom of your heart."

Swamishri replied, "What you said was true. Didn't Shastriji Maharaj often claim to be merely like a buffalo working for the sake of Akshar and Purushottam. Where is a buffalo and where is God! Of course we are secondary to God. The Vachanamrut says that God is higher than even Akshar. So you were right in saying that we have no value

without Maharaj. The problem is that the words 'no value' sound harsh; but the scriptures mention the same concepts. We need not fall into mere verbal debates. But when we have to expound the greatness of Shriji Maharaj, God supreme, we must realize that all the avatars and even Akshar is secondary. Shriji Maharaj, in the end, is the all-doer. Nothing happens without his wish.

"Yet, Gunatitanand Swami has said that the true sadhu is the greatest of all. That is absolutely correct, because everything up to Prakruti-Purush is secondary to Akshar. However, Akshar is great only because he has kept God. Without God, even Akshar would be nothing. We must think over these words and understand them fully."

Swamishri was talking continuously, as if in one breath. Many times in the past he has explained the bliss of Shriji Maharaj, quoting from Vachanamrut Sarangpur-1, "If one were to gather together all of the pleasures of the *vishays* of countless millions of *brahmands*, even then it would not equal even one millionth of a fraction of the bliss which is present in just one pore of God."

"God's radiance and charm is such that even millions of beautiful goddesses would be put to shame. He is the Lord of millions of universes. He is our controller. He is omniscient and is the source of infinite bliss. After seeing Him only once, the combined beauty of all the beautiful women in the world would become insignificant..."

This is the bliss of God! Infinite bliss! This is what Swamishri enjoys every moment of his life. It is no wonder he always puts God first in every activity of his life.

In addition to the above, two thoughts are concurrent in every action of Swamishri: the first is to please God; the second is that he constantly believes himself to be a servant of God.

Whatever activity Swamishri undertakes, it is never for himself; instead, he constantly maintains the thought that 'I

want to please God.' He offers devotion in this manner, not mechanically. This form of devotion is so powerful that it can even destroy the deadly grip of *maya* and karma.

Also, because he understands the unparalleled glory of God, he can maintain a constant thought of being a servant, not a boss. If even God cannot fully understand his own glory, then how can we ever hope to? Keeping this thought in mind, one is bound to feel minute and negligible in front of God. Swamishri maintains this attitude constantly.

It is due to the above two thoughts that he is constantly at peace. It is due to these that he continues to please us as well. He has been extremely compassionate with us and that is why we are happy today. We too must learn these two virtues from Swamishri's life.

From hearing incidents such as these, we begin to understand his true form, as he really is. But how can we ensure that our understanding will never change for the worse?

Once a reporter asked Yogi Bapa in London, "Your disciples claim you are like a lotus in a pond, untouched. They say you live in this world but are unaffected by it. But how can we be sure?"

Yogi Bapa gave an answer which went uncontested, "Become like us! Only then will you understand."

That is the answer to the previous question. To ensure that our understanding of Swamishri will never change, we must become like Swamishri. If we want to know a doctor completely, we must first become a doctor. Similarly, in order to know Swamishri completely, we must first become a genuine sadhu – not merely by donning a sadhu's clothes, but by developing virtues.

Currently, even though we haven't yet reached that stage, we can still see Swamishri as someone different from the other sadhus in the world. We still see some sort of divinity. From his life we can still deduce that he is

untouched by the pleasures of the world. Imagine, then, how divine he will appear to us when we reach a spiritual level such as his.

We can infer from his constant tranquillity that Swamishri is enjoying happiness of a different sort. By his association, even the most base instincts in man, such as lust, anger, greed, jealousy, ego, etc. are uprooted from their very source. If he can destroy others' defects, then how can there be even a trace in him? This is why Swamishri remains ever serene and at peace.

d d d

Why has Swamishri descended on earth? Is it to diminish the weight of his previous karmas? Or is it because he still has to endeavour to realize God? Is it because he still has to fight against his inner enemies? Or does he still have to gain conquest over his own mind and body? In the past, many great philosophers have made their goal, 'Know thyself.' Is this also Swamishri's goal?

To all the above questions, we must answer, No! Swamishri is eternally realized. He is Aksharbrahman. Just as we are body-conscious without any effort, he is engrossed in God without effort. He has come on this earth to release countless souls from their worldly bondage. He has come to destroy our previous sins and to redeem. If this is the case then how can Swamishri himself have any faults within himself? If even an ordinary disciple can become desireless through his association, how can there be any desires within him? Gunatitanand Swami has said, "On having the darshan of such a sadhu, innumerable sins of the past are burned away." Again, let us remember that Swamishri is Aksharbrahman and he has come to make us *brahmarup*, like him.

Once in Gondal Swamishri addressed the assembly, "We have obtained what we were going to obtain after death in this very birth – God. In the end, this is all that we need to

realize. Without this realization, we will always feel incomplete. Our patience will run out and we will think, 'I don't feel any progress. What's the point?' We will begin looking towards the sky for God, when he is present here on earth. We don't believe in the form in front of us and we cannot see the form above us. Believe this to be Akshardham. If we develop this faith then we will feel happy and content. Why search elsewhere to find Akshardham? This is Akshardham personified..."

Swamishri's talk was so sincere and his tone so honest that all the devotees in the audience were convinced of his words. All accepted the talk with great enthusiasm.

Once in Rajkot, the Governor of Orissa, Yagnadatt Sharma, had arrived for Swamishri's darshan. He asked Swamishri to bless him so that he enjoys everlasting peace and also that India may have a bright future.

Swamishri, blessing him, spoke in Hindi, "We shall pray to God that may you attain peace."

The Governor said, "Swamiji! Why are you praying to God? God is like a servant at your feet."

Swamishri, feeling as if he had committed a grave mistake, immediately explained to the Governor, "No, no. In fact, we are the servants of God, God is not our servant!"

The Governor replied, "Swamiji! God is always willing to serve his true devotee. He is willing to do as you say. He wouldn't listen to sinners like us..."

In the end Swamishri uttered one sentence which shows how he has kept God within him. Swamishri said, "We will definitely tell God of your wishes." Who else except Aksharbrahman himself could converse with God so perfectly? He has kept God naturally, without strain or effort, whereas many other sadhus in the world make tremendous effort to fix their mind on God. In fact, many even fail and quit after years of striving. Swamishri, on the other hand, has God within every pore of his body. He houses God, nothing else.

Yes, we may question how we can receive that same happiness and bliss without being worthy of it? How can we keep Parabrahman without being Aksharbrahman ourselves? How can a 1-litre container hold 1,000 litres of milk? If we claim that Swamishri has come only to give us that bliss of God then why does he also fulfil our worldly desires? It makes us wonder, Which is his real goal? We have seen the problems he attends to daily – problems between parents and children, disharmony between wife and husband, disagreements in business, college admission problems, permission problems, etc. Swamishri gives his blessings for all of these. Why, then, does he support worldly activities by answering these questions? The answer in Swamishri's own words.

While delivering a discourse in Gondal, Swamishri once said, "You will find many people in this world who can give you worldly pleasures. Some even give blessings, such as, 'Here, take my blessings! I grant you a son.'"

Before Swamishri finished, Shri Krishna Pandya interrupted and joked in front of Swamishri, "This Mahatma (Swamishri) can grant sons and liberation as well. He can give both worldly security and heavenly peace."

Swamishri retorted immediately, "Actually we have come to grant liberation only. He knows about nothing else but redemption. Whatever else we give you is like a father giving a toy to a child. In the end, he will never let one get caught up in worldly pleasures. If he wishes, he may give worldly objects. But he may also wish to take them away! Most fundamentally, he has come to redeem, not to bind."

Swamishri's goals are clear. He aims to help the *atma*, not the body. Even if he does help by giving worldly objects, they only provide short-term happiness; but for everlasting peace of mind, Swamishri's reply must stand.

Actually, it seems very logical – if he himself has a aversion for worldly pleasures, why would he give them to

others? What objects does he ask for? Nothing. His taking interest in our day-to-day affairs is like a father giving a chocolate to his child. If he wants to send his child to school, he may be compelled to give a chocolate. Ultimately, the goal is to educate the child, to enable him to progress so that in the future he may grow up to be a good doctor or engineer. Similarly, Swamishri constantly gives us blessings for our worldly desires, but his goal is to take out desires from every corner of our heart and fill it with the divine bliss of God. By whatever means, he aims to give God, nothing else.



3. CROSSING THE OCEAN OF DEATH

If we are to understand Swamishri completely, we must first understand the nature of the cycle of births and deaths. We must ponder over the horror and pains of death. We must also realize the agony and anguish caused by “I-ness” and “My-ness”.

The cycle of lives and deaths is a disease which we have contracted since time immemorial. It isn’t a question of a mere 20 or 30 years. Our captivity has been since eternity. In each life we have had to suffer from the countless miseries inherent in the universe around us. Before each birth we have had to tolerate the agonies inside the mother’s womb, painfully hanging upside down. We have forgotten these pains due to our state of ignorance. Throughout the ages, our inner instincts and base desires have bound our *jiva*. Hatred, anger, ego, jealousy, lust, greed and countless other inner defects have continued to scorch our souls through time.

These miseries are so severe that we tremble at the mere thought of re-experiencing even a small sample. Without the aid of a true sadhu, man makes futile efforts to escape the bondage of this world, and in this futility loses a golden opportunity in the form of this human birth.

After living a pleasure-filled life, the final moments arrive. Slowly, one realizes the utter selfishness of so-called loved ones. One may be comforted by their warmth but in the end one burns with the thoughts of having to abandon them. ‘Do I have to leave everything behind and go alone?’ One’s mind questions painfully. Instead of realizing this during life, one gains this wisdom on the deathbed, when it is too late. Regrets enhance the agony which the *jiva* is

already suffering. As if this isn't enough, sins which one has committed through life continue to haunt one, even after leaving the body. Just as our dreams reflect our actions during the day, the last moments reflect the actions performed throughout life. Without having performed good deeds, how can he face the horrors of death, and even worse, the horrors after death?

Fear of the pains of death. Fear of leaving alone. Fear of what is next. Fear of the next birth. Fear of hell... Being unstable, alone, ignorant and bewildered, how can a man face death? Bhagwan Swaminarayan has also said, "During the last moments, the *jiva* suffers miseries beyond imagination." This is the horrific picture of death – a picture in which all must one day take part.

Now imagine the greatness of someone who can save us from these miseries! Pramukh Swami Maharaj is such a person! Through his grace, through devotion towards God and his Sadhu, boundless miseries can be destroyed within a second. All we are asked to do is to realize the true form of God and his Sadhu – it is a question of only one second, no more. In one moment, an entire ocean of miseries can be dried up. In one moment, the Himalayan ranges can be flattened into plains. That is the magic of *swarupnishtha*, realizing God and his Sadhu in their true form, as they really are.

In the past, countless people have tasted the nectar of redemption through Swamishri's grace. We, too, can experience the same bliss and joy in this very life, provided we realize the above facts. With this realization, the *jiva* sheds all worldly desires as easily as a snake sheds its skin. Belief leads to complete freedom.

What a wonderful outcome! Miseries are transformed magically into joy! By his guidance, one loves to live a life filled with fragrance – a life without addictions, a life filled with love and compassion, a cultured life, guided by

discipline and wisdom. One truly enjoys living life. What's more, one is constantly joyous of the fact that in this very life one has attained final redemption from the cycle of births and deaths.

To sum up, the following are some remedies to cure the disease of the cycle of births and deaths:

- Deep attachment and love for the Satpurush – Pramukh Swami Maharaj
- Remove the distance between the Satpurush and us by believing him to be faultless and omniscient
- Serve the Satpurush by mind, action and speech
- Keep the company of the Satpurush
- Obey the wishes of the Satpurush through mind, action and speech
- Make the Satpurush our master and become his servant

Of course, the most important and all-encompassing remedy is that of *swarupnishtha*, realizing his true form and identity. By doing this much, life becomes joyous and death divine. Fear of the awaiting horrors of the afterlife are replaced by the joys of living this life and the confidence that escape from such horrors is guaranteed.

Once someone was talking about the terror of atom bombs in front of Swamishri. Swamishri was asked, "Bapa! What will become of us when such a blast occurs?"

Swamishri replied in a steady, composed tone, "Whatever will happen to others is what will happen to us! We'll be even happier in the afterlife because, after all, we will be sitting in the bliss of Akshardham. Why should we worry?" Truly, such fearlessness and faith in God can work wonders for devotees, consoling and easing their tensions of the future. In the end, everything comes and goes, so why grasp or cling? Why worry or cringe? Why live in fantasy of what might happen?

How has Swamishri really helped in easing the pains of

death? How has he shown care and concern during such a stressful moment of life? The following incidents will illustrate...

“I’m leaving for Akshardham” were the last faint words his wife managed to hear at exactly 2.10 am. With this, Rajendrakumar (Aku), a member of the Ajmera family of Kolkata, left his mortal body.

Swamishri was travelling to Kolkata from Delhi especially to meet him. During the flight Swamishri paused his letter-reading for a moment of silent prayer. Swamishri’s face seemed different from its norm. His silence had a purpose.

On landing at the Kolkata airport, Swamishri said, “Aku is seriously ill, so let us see him first. Take us to his home...” This is what had brought Swamishri here all the way from Delhi. But realizing Swamishri’s strenuous travels and seeing the fatigue on his face, Aku’s uncle, Kishorebhai, and other relatives requested, “Bapa, you are tired from a long journey. Why don’t we wait till tomorrow morning. He is also longing to talk with you...” Swamishri agreed by giving no reply.

Swamishri arose the next morning, on the day of their scheduled meeting. Although they had not met physically, Swamishri had already met Aku through his divine body. He had already taken Aku to Akshardham and handed him over to Shriji Maharaj! When informed of Aku’s passing away, Swamishri’s eyes welled up with tears. There seemed to be a trace of regret for not meeting him in person before he passed away. But of course, their souls had already met.

Later in the morning, Swamishri arrived at Aku’s home and seeing his deceased body, said, “He was very lucky... He left while worshipping God. We had a deep desire to meet him but we weren’t able to. But even though we didn’t meet physically, our souls have indeed met... His

face seems just as serene as before. Now he is enjoying the bliss of Maharaj in Akshardham...”

Looking at the radiance on Aku’s face, one could hardly tell that he had died of cancer! Why the serenity? Even during such a painful and terminal illness, he had never mentally separated himself from Swamishri.

d d d

Dolatbhai Desai was a staunch devotee living in Mumbai. Although he was a part of the wealthy ‘Jay Coach’ family and very well off financially, Swamishri had given him much more bliss than his fortune.

He himself was intelligent and a righteous householder. But unfortunately, both his young son and daughter were killed in an accident. The tragedy of the incident had left a tremendous scar in Dolatbhai’s life. At that time he wasn’t associated with Satsang, and so he wasn’t able to emotionally cope with the tragedy. As a result, he became seriously ill. To his luck, though, he found Satsang – seemingly as a potential remedy to his illness. But unfortunately, the disease had already harmed the body beyond repair. At that time...

He developed complete faith in Swamishri. Swamishri often went to him and inspired him. But suddenly, the final moments arrived. Both his lungs failed him. He was immediately admitted to the Hinduja Hospital in Mumbai. His entire body became paralysed, except for his eyes. Even during such excruciating and frustrating circumstances, his face denied even a single wrinkle of worry or misery!

Whenever sadhus visited Dolatbhai in the hospital they invariably found him meditating on the *murti* of Swamishri opposite his bed. In the meantime, Siddheshwar Swami informed Swamishri in Gondal that Dolatbhai was now approaching his final moments. The very next day, Swamishri flew from nearby Rajkot to Mumbai.

When Swamishri arrived, Dolatbhai was breathing with

the aid of a respirator. Swamishri sat next to him on his bed and wished him 'Jai Swaminarayan'. On meeting Swamishri, Dolatbhai's joy knew no bounds. His face looked as if it had found new life. In fact, he had found immortality. There were no words, only emotions. His devotion, his love towards Swamishri and his faith in him had captured Swamishri himself. Replying to his silent prayers, Swamishri said, "Don't worry. Maharaj will now take you to Akshardham. You will enjoy his *seva* and company now."

After two days, Dolatbhai left his mortal frame.

Swamishri's last words gave the warmth of God; they weren't merely words arranged mechanically to convey a feeling of consolation. They were a guarantee of infinite bliss.

d d d

Swamishri had arrived to give his final darshan to a staunch devotee of Jitodiya, Shri Ishwarbhai. Swamishri, blessing him, said, "You have done all you had to do in life. You had an inner wish to meet, so Thakorji has arrived especially for you..." Swamishri put forward the *murti* of Thakorji so that Ishwarbhai could have darshan. Continuing, Swamishri said, "Harikrishna Maharaj is giving you darshan in person. He will make you happy for eternity..."

Thereafter, Swamishri himself fed a small spoonful of consecrated water to Ishwarbhai and promised to take him to Akshardham. Before leaving, Swamishri again blessed him, "Maharaj will come in person to take you."

A few days later, when Swamishri was in Atladra, news arrived that Ishwarbhai had passed away to Akshardham.

d d d

Rambhai, an aged devotee of Mojidad had developed cancer. He had a final wish to have Swamishri's darshan. The moment Swamishri found out, he and a group of sadhus

visited the small village of Mojidad. Swamishri stayed there for three days and gave immense bliss to all. Finally, he showed him the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj and said, "You have done your work in this world and have also prepared for the afterworld. Now fix your mind on this *murti*. Maharaj will arrive and take you after Uttarayan."

Swamishri then took off his own saffron upper garment and covered Rambhai's body. Swamishri said, "Now you have put on the holy saffron. You are free of bondage and worries of this world. Pray to Maharaj constantly. He will definitely take you..."

Ten days after Uttarayan, Rambhai called his relatives near. He made all sing the *dhun* and thereby remember the holy name of Maharaj. He asked to have Swamishri's upper garment touched over his entire body. His last words, "Now Maharaj will take me..." That same day, later in the morning, Maharaj took Rambhai to Akshardham. After this incident, Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave darshan to his relatives – Mukundbhai, Pitambarbhai's wife and Ghanshyambhai's daughter – at various times. All were convinced of Swamishri's words and were thereby consoled.

d d d

Swamishri had personally given blessings to Surendrabhai Dalal of Mumbai. After one week, while Swamishri was in Lonawala, he called again for blessings.

Swamishri replied on the phone, "Maintain peace of mind. We have done our work in this world. Now we want to sit in Maharaj and Swami's service. Remember them constantly. Don't think of anything else. Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj will take you!"

Seemingly, as if he had just gained a permit, Surendrabhai left for Akshardham the very next day while singing kirtans and *dhun*.

d d d

On one occasion, one of our staunch devotees, Harshadbhai Dave, was hospitalized due to a serious illness. Although Swamishri was in Bhopal at the time, the moment he heard the news, Swamishri immediately travelled to Mumbai. Harshadbhai, in addition to gaining Shastriji Maharaj's pleasure, was deeply involved in Satsang activities and had performed unparalleled service in spreading its message. He was a steadfast devotee and had upheld the Akshar Purushottam philosophy. Harshadbhai had been instrumental in writing much of the Satsang literature. On meeting him, Swamishri immediately blessed him and praised his selfless service for the Sanstha. Having fulfilled Harshadbhai's desires, Swamishri returned to Gondal. In a few days, Harshadbhai left his mortal body to serve Maharaj permanently in Akshardham.

d d d

Babubhai Brahmhatt of Mumbai was in a deep coma. After arriving in the hospital, Swamishri raised his voice and said 'Jai Swaminarayan' a few times in Babubhai's ears. Getting no response, Swamishri continued, "You had a desire to meet us. You may not be able to respond but at least our eyes have met. Remember Yogi Bapa and chant the name of Maharaj in your mind. You have enjoyed his company; so recall those memories constantly. Fix your mind on God. I also desired to meet you. Our souls have met. Maharaj will bless you and make you happy."

After this meeting, Babubhai, as if having nothing more to live for, passed away to Akshardham.

d d d

Once, in Rajkot, Swamishri had told Surendrasinh, "We know how to take people to Akshardham."

Once, a small child by the name of Mitul, son of Harshadbhai of Luton, asked Swamishri, "Bapa! Where is Akshardham?"

Swamishri replied instantly, "This is Akshardham."

"Will you take me in a rocket?"

"Yes, I will take you." Who else but Swamishri can speak with such conviction?

Now we must ask ourselves, Do we truly believe Swamishri's words in the above incidents? Our only misfortune is that we have attained something unattainable all too easily. And so our minds argue, 'Swamishri is compelled to give such replies.' Or else, 'He is just trying to console.' Or maybe, 'He is just trying to make it sound good so that we maintain patience and enthusiasm.'

In reality, it is not so. Swamishri's words aren't hollow words of pacification. They are a guarantee to a favourable outcome and to true happiness. They come from pure conviction.

In understanding these incidents, one point we must always keep in mind is that Swamishri is talking from his vantage point – above *maya*. Secondly, Swamishri's nature can never accommodate even the slightest hypocrisy or deception. Thirdly, he doesn't have the slightest trace of ego within himself. Never in his life has he done anything for popularity or esteem. He has always kept God first in his life; why then, would he need to make a show? He is above the three *gunas*, above the three bodies and above the three states of consciousness. He is above time and space. These are facts not describable by words. Maintaining a strict vow of celibacy, Swamishri's life has always been pure and unblemished by scandals. In fact, throughout his life, he has never broken even the smallest vow of conduct!

This shows that his words come from authority to redeem. The purity of his life clears all doubts from our minds.

Swamishri is *vachansiddh* – whatever he says happens. He is truthful and wise. He has attained the perfect state of being able to discriminate between truth and falsity. But above all, he has constant rapport with God. That is why he

is the ideal person who can help us attain rapport with God.

For most, death and its final moments are sheer agony. Shriji Maharaj has said in the Vachanamrut that even *atmanishtha* – realization of the *atma* – becomes impotent against the power of death. It may help in life to overcome insults or to bear hardships. But crossing death is like trying to cross an ocean! Without the aid of a boat in the form of God, even the most confident swimmer fails. Only a sadhu like Swamishri can help us cross such hideous waters to the shores of Divinity.



4. LEADER OF THE GUNATIT COMMUNITY

In one sense, our Satsang fellowship can be referred to as a ‘Gunatit Community’. It is a community which will settle for nothing less than Swamishri as its leader. What is this community really like? Shriji Maharaj answers through a poem written by Premanand Swami, “*Sarve divya chhe re, tyāto joyāni chhe jukta*” – Everything about Akshardham is divine; seeing is believing. Even here, each member of the Gunatit community can be viewed as a *mukta* or a would-be *mukta* on the path to Akshardham. Explaining the greatness of this community, Shriji Maharaj says in Vachanamrut Gadhada I-24 that just the fact that the *jiva* has attained association with Satsang shows that it has performed countless great deeds in either this birth or previous births. So, without our realizing it, the Satsang community is filled with noble souls who have performed countless noble acts in the past. With such a rich history, how can they settle for anything less than Swamishri?

Secondly, this community feels that now that they have found such a precious sadhu – and God through him – they yearn to sacrifice everything they have for him. They have absolutely no appetite for selfish gains. If they had to choose between Swamishri on the one side and all the worldly pleasures on the other – keep one and lose the other – they would undoubtedly pass on the worldly pleasures and select Swamishri. With disciples of such calibre, how can a guru not be pleased?

These disciples have always viewed divinity in even the most mundane and human action of the guru. They have renounced both ignorance and conceit. They know that

everything about their guru is divine. Although superficially they themselves may have human idiosyncrasies, inside they are pure at heart and genuine. This is a community which desires to overcome the limits of the body and move to the higher, divine planes of life. This is all they long for, nothing else. With such lofty, noble goals, how can Swamishri not be pleased with them?

These devotees aren't impressed with magic, miracles or spiritual powers. Neither does the complexity of yoga or brain-racking scriptural knowledge fascinate their minds. Why? Because they only thirst for concrete happiness, not abstract promises. As a result, they are convinced from the bottom of their heart that they are working towards final redemption, not just towards temporary peace of mind (as per Vachanamruts Gadhada I-35 and 50). They have full faith in the Akshar Purushottam *upasana*. No matter what happens, they will never put their faith anywhere else. They are convinced that they will not find a person like Swamishri in the whole world.

If the Gunatit community is of such calibre, Swamishri, as a leader of this community, cannot be of any lesser quality. That is why we can see through countless incidents the seamless harmony which exists between guru and disciple.

So what are the qualities and virtues in Swamishri that touch the heart of our Gunatit community?

First of all, on merely having the darshan of Swamishri, disciples are convinced of having attained liberation from *maya*. And how can anyone else besides a completely liberated being inspire such conviction in others? Their beliefs are based on nothing else but his way of life. They will not settle for beauty or powers or even superficial virtues. They only ask, "How does he live? Does he behave as *brahmarup*, separate from the body?" Due to their asking the right question, they are never diverted by

pseudo-sadhus. That is why they enjoy Swamishri's company more than anything else.

In 1986 a group of sadhus, including myself, met Swamishri in Bochasan after completing a world tour to gather ideas for the Akshardham project. Akshaymuni Swami talked to Swamishri at great length about the technology available in the world at the time. Later, Swamishri mentioned in his blessings, "We didn't understand much about the technology which these sadhus talked about. But our own technology is straightforward and simple: This body is temporary and the soul is immortal. We don't understand anything else. The only thing worth seeing in this world is God. And the only thing worth doing in life is worshipping him..."

The first important aspect to check in a sadhu's manner of living is his firmness in observing the *panch vartmans*, viz. *nishkam*, *nirlobh*, *nisswad*, *nissneh* and *nirman*. The second aspect is that he should, after becoming *brahmarup*, worship God constantly. In Swamishri we can see both aspects shining through. In him there is not even a trace of impurity. After seeing the disregard which he has shown for his physical body, we feel convinced that our body is not worth caring for. This is the leader of the Gunatit community! Any other leader in the world would enjoy pleasures at the cost of his subordinates. For us it is much the opposite. We enjoy the bliss of Satsang at the cost of our guru's efforts! In the past, many have sacrificed much for their disciples, but none like Swamishri – for so long, to such an extent, despite countless health problems.

Swamishri is extremely honest. In him we cannot see even a trace of deception or hiding of any sort. As a result, his life moulds our lives. What cannot be achieved through reading of books or through personal efforts, we can achieve on merely looking at Swamishri. Swamishri is absolutely pure. But his purity can only be seen through

our inner eyes. Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, who had such a divine vision, were able to see Swamishri's spotless life.

I have seen him for the last 25 years. After Yogiji Maharaj reverted to Akshardham to this day, in all the whirlwind of activities and projects, his ideals and his life have never changed – he has worked with only one goal: to fulfil the wishes of his gurus, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. In the world today we can see countless renunciants who change their guru's philosophies and priorities every year, some every six months! Views, opinions and regulations constantly change. Swamishri has remained steady in his views and thereby given steadiness to our views.

Once, Swamishri was spending a few light moments with several sadhus. Bhagwatcharan Swami asked, "Swami, why don't you become the Prime Minister? I will become the Finance Minister."

Swamishri raised the rosary in his hands and replied, "It's not worth the trouble. It's much better to become a Rosary Minister!" From Swamishri's words we realize that even if we were to offer pleasures of the entire world to him, he would not be entrapped; he would never leave God.

As the leader of a rapidly expanding, international organization, many renowned renunciants, scientists, politicians and celebrities come to meet Swamishri. Without fail, each dignitary experiences some type of divine encounter. When we examine the similarity of everyone's experiences we feel as if they had discussed Swamishri in a meeting and had come up with a unanimous decision on how to view him. The reason for this phenomenon is that Swamishri's virtues are divine, not worldly.

The late Swami Atmanandji, president of the Ramkrishna Mission in Raipur, narrated his own

experience with the following words, "Swamishri is such a divine person! He is so humble. Such great souls are truly rare in our age. His nature and personality has truly touched me. Spiritually, he is of an extremely lofty level and yet he remains quiet, non-boasting. Yet, even with his quiet, he can move thousands around him into action..."

Ramswarup Shastriji, president of the All-India Sadhu Samaj, says, "Having come into contact with Pramukh Swami Maharaj, I encountered a completely unique experience. His distinguishing qualities are his simplicity, straight-forwardness and openness. Through such a pure life, Swamishri is constantly inspiring others..."

Shri Jatthedar Rachpal Singh, president of Shiromani Akalidal, said of Swamishri, "He is such a great man! Finding such a sadhu is a one in a million long shot. God works through him."

Shri Mohanbhai Patel, former Sheriff of Mumbai and a renowned businessman once said, "In Swamishri's presence we see that people feel proud. They feel energetic. In just a few moments interaction, we gain so much. In him people see saintliness and that is what touches people the most. Pramukh Swami is the essence of simplicity. Even in his talks, there is no show through flowery language; we don't find complexities in thoughts; no attempts to appear big. Only simple, straightforward, everyday language – which even an ordinary layman can grasp. His honesty is such that his words can be considered a holy scripture..."

People from many different fields and of varied backgrounds meet Swamishri at different times. Yet each individual's experience mirrors another's in some manner.

In reality, though, the opinions of dignitaries are far from being the best criteria in judging his personality. His greatest virtue is that he has no desire to become 'special'. He has no desire to become separate and higher than us. Throughout his life, he has always put aside his greatness

and taken any available opportunity to serve others.

In 1994, a special *shibir* had been organized for the sadhus of the organization in Karjat, near Mumbai. As part of the programmes, Shri Harishbhai Dave, General Secretary of BAPS, delivered an informative lecture narrating how the organization's social and educational activities have flourished over the years. He also mentioned that the activities are now reaching other parts of the world. Swamishri was also present in the assembly.

After the talk, Swamishri was to give his blessings. All thought that he would elaborate on Harishbhai's talks and would give inspiration for even more growth.

Instead, from the beginning, it seemed that Swamishri had a different idea. Swamishri said, "What Harishbhai has just said is fine. The Sanstha has grown quickly; it is all due to Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj's grace and vision. We are only a medium... Now we shouldn't feel that we have done enough and there is nothing more to be done... We should always be aware of complacency. Otherwise, we will fall quickly after reaching a short-lived peak. We must maintain our vows, our saintliness and a spirit of service. That is progress. If there is one thing responsible for the Sanstha's growth, it is saintliness... If we maintain that, then Maharaj will accompany us in any corner of the world..."

Swamishri talked continuously for 40 minutes, during which he talked about the greater importance of internal progress as compared to external progress. He wants action. This is the one reason why everyone from elderly sadhus to the smallest child in the Sanstha has faith in Swamishri that true progress can be made here and only here.

Of course, he has never sacrificed external progress at the cost of internal growth. He has never allowed any carelessness or complacency in the Sanstha's activities. Who else but Swamishri can inspire such a wonderful

balance between outer activity and inner strengthening.

That is why Swamishri himself has always been enthusiastic in maintaining a myriad of responsibilities. He has always performed his duties with devotion, without diaries and without personal assistants. He has done so much, so quietly – in ordinary sittings, while walking, while meeting people. How is it possible? How does he cope? The answer is that he honestly believes that his work is devotion to God. He feels that God is watching. If a guru can work with such zeal and understanding, how can a disciple not follow in his footsteps?

Disciples are a guru's reflections. If the guru harbours jealousy, he is bound to instill it in his disciples, knowingly or unknowingly. Swamishri has been generous to all and so his disciples have complied.

d d d

Once, in one of our *shikharbaddh* mandirs, the marble supports behind the *murtis* in the main shrines were to be removed. Removing the support from one of the *murtis* was successful, but the other support posed a risk of physical damage to the *murtis*. If that happened, it would mean having to change a *murti* which Shastriji Maharaj had consecrated himself. I asked the responsible sadhu not to take the risk. But he had faith that nothing would happen to the *murti*. Still, I told him to ask Swamishri first before proceeding.

The sadhu phoned Swamishri. Before he could even finish asking the question, Swamishri refused to allow him, telling him that the *murti* is fine the way it is. The sadhu attempted to present the same arguments he had given me earlier. But Swamishri insisted, "Why are you trying to argue with me? I know everything about the situation. I have had proper darshan of the *murtis*, and I am telling you that the *murti* will definitely be damaged if you make any attempts. So leave it just as it is..."

In matters such as these, Swamishri has never been pulled or influenced by emotions. In matters of principle, Swamishri has always been stern.

A renowned scholar and an important community leader in Gujarat once suggested to Swamishri that the restriction of sadhus not speaking with women would have to be slackened in the future. Swamishri replied clearly and confidently, “You will not be able to understand us on this topic. This is a vow given to us by Maharaj himself, and so it will remain valid. It can never be compromised...”

No sweet talk such as ‘We’ll see’ or ‘We’ll think over it’. His decision was firm and final. This is another unique attribute of Swamishri’s style of work.

Being a person of such an eminent position, thousands of people open their hearts to him and reveal their deepest and most guarded secrets. Swamishri also has the adeptness to judge people’s nature on mere sight. Yet, the most astounding fact about him is that he never views these people as ignorant or useless or spoiled. In every moment of his life we can easily notice the fact that no matter who he meets, he always views others with respect. He always shows genuine love, no matter how many times the individual returns with problems.

Once at the Ahmedabad mandir, Swamishri was walking towards his place of residence after completing his morning *puja* in the courtyard. As usual, hundreds of devotees had gathered for his darshan. One elderly devotee was waiting in line with only one wish in mind – maybe Swamishri’s eyes will meet mine just for a split second. Swamishri was walking and blessing people along the way. As I was just behind Swamishri, I realized that he had by-passed that devotee without meeting him. Before I could do anything else, I saw that Swamishri had noticed. He turned back and looking at the devotee straight in the eyes, said, “Jai Swaminarayan!” Swamishri met him affectionately and the devotee felt satisfied and joyous.

I felt a bit puzzled. Why the attraction? What would cause so much joy in just a moment of meeting? Probably it is the fact that Swamishri has kept God in every pore of his body. Even after doing so much for society, he feels indebted to God. He feels that ‘I am doing nothing, God is doing the work...’

What a rare and wonderful person we have found in Swamishri!

With such a virtuous leader our Gunatit community is indeed extremely fortunate. Once we have seen the virtues in Swamishri, we have learned to measure everyone else. Pseudo-renunciants immediately lose their impact on our minds. The wisdom which we cannot gain even from reading books, we can gain from simply having Swamishri’s darshan. His virtues are such that they can benefit us in all walks of life. An open, straightforward life. Never egotistic. Never has he tried to portray himself as great; never has he tried to make a show of his talents; never has he tried to pull others down.

Swamishri is a Gunatit sadhu, above the three *gunas*. How, then, can we hope to measure him by *sattvagun* standards? He looks to be active and busy, not very God-oriented. But at the centre of his whirlwind of activities is the quiet and peace of Sahajanand Swami.

The world can boast of many virtuous and religious men. But how many can make others virtuous and spiritual? How many aspirants are ready to accept him as a guru? Suppose the aspirant does accept him... How many can make others renounce the world and choose the life of a sadhu? How many can help us in this world and the afterworld? How many can truly help us realize the ultimate goal of human birth – *moksha*? Swamishri has taken on the responsibility of making our dejected soul divine. This is Swamishri, leader of our Gunatit Community!



5. GOD CONSCIOUS

According to most people's concepts, a sadhu should spend his time in the seclusion of forests or mountains. But Swamishri is different. He travels throughout the globe as an integral member of society.

Swamishri is a sadhu who can work along the international forefront and still not let his activities affect his saintliness. In fact, as he works in society, not only does he remain pure, but he helps society become pure and uncontaminated.

He works paying no heed to his body; he speaks with a spirit; he walks freely, without worries; he smiles constantly, lost forever in the bliss of God.

Once Swamishri was asked, "What thought do you keep 24 hours a day?"

He replied, "Thoughts of God."

"What are your personal views of Harikrishna Maharaj?"

Swamishri replied instantly, "He himself is personal to me! What other view can I give?"

God is so real to him that he is constantly basking in his bliss. For him, God has become more than a mere metaphysical concept – he sees God just as he can see us. That is why he seems everfresh. No matter how hectic his day, he always seems light and jovial – never too busy to offer a helping hand. Lost in the bliss of God, Swamishri, with his pristine saintliness, is working to share his happiness with the rest of the world.

Just as a lion will never eat grass, Swamishri has no need for praise and applause. Just as sugarcane is crushed to give nectar-like juice, Swamishri has completely crushed

and exhausted his body to give us the nectar of God.

Swamishri lives in a technological age; he is surrounded by technological-minded people; he even travels in technologically advanced countries. Yet, without even the slightest note of disharmony, he has never sacrificed the traditional and genuine ways of a sadhu! The fact that he has maintained his stability shows that he is a being of a different kind.

We have seen him joke and laugh with sadhus and devotees. We have seen him conversing with children freely and openly. We have seen him make pivotal decisions in tense and pressure-filled situations with absolute faith, leaving the outcome to Maharaj's wish. Constantly immersed in an ocean of other people's problems, he has never become irritated or ruffled. His speech has never become rude or harsh. On the contrary, he has become more and more generous and friendly.

What does all of this show? It shows that he is absolutely true. His heart is pure and free of hatred. He is above the three *gunas*. Even Maharaj is captivated by a being of such virtues. His acts, his emotions and his thoughts – in fact, everything about him can never be divorced from God.

For us, our ego is ever-present and all-encompassing. For Swamishri, thoughts of God are ever-present and all-encompassing. Man uses his ego to gain short-lived pleasure. Swamishri uses God to gain everlasting peace. Which do we want? The choice is ours.



6. AN 'ACTIVE' SADHU

No meditation. No *asans*. No *pranayam*. Yet Swamishri is a 'yogi' in the truest sense of the word!

People ask, "What is your sadhana?"

Swamishri replies simply, "We worship God and show others the way to God. That's our sadhana."

It sounds too simple; so, we find it difficult to swallow. It is a law of nature that anytime we get involved in activities, our base instincts such as anger, jealousy, ego, etc. are bound to surface. It seems that involvement in activities and *sadhuta* stand at opposite extremes. Then how can they come together coherently? Even though many feel both are contradictory terms, after studying Swamishri's life, we notice that our doubts about this dilemma vanish immediately. Swamishri is a glorious harmony of spirituality and activity.

Today, when we examine Swamishri's life, we see that never ever is he found alone! All around him, wherever he goes, there is a constant whirlwind of activity. Yet, amidst all of these activities, Swamishri always shines through as quiet and unassuming. So many activities and yet Swamishri seems inactive! Some of the adjectives which dignitaries have used to describe him are ample proof of both, "Creator of a cultured society," "Unparalleled leader of the Hindu sadhu community," "A shining sun in the lineage of holy Hindu sadhus," "A messenger of peace and tranquillity," "*Sadhuta* personified," etc.

The reason for these assertions is the fact that in every activity he has taken up, Swamishri has always worked selflessly, honestly, humbly and openly. As a result, he is able to forgive mistakes which result from involvement in

activities. Also, due to the same virtues, he is able to share the success and fruits of the activities with others.

Disregarding concern for his body, Swamishri has never craved for enjoying the fruits of his actions. As a result, he, unlike other leaders, has never needed to play politics or use dirty tactics to buy power. He works with people keeping a simple principle in mind, God is in everyone. As a result, he has never resorted to pulling others down; nor has he favoured one side and disregarded the other; nor has he shown hatred towards anyone. He has always kept an open mind and an open heart.

So what are the fruits of such compassionate behaviour? What does Swamishri's *sadhuta* give?

In 1985, India went to London for the grand Cultural Festival of India. As part of the festivities and as an expression of our devotion, Swamishri was to be weighed against gold in the Suvarna Tula Mahotsav. As a token of their devotion and love towards Swamishri, youths had donated generously. The venue for the festivities was the QPR football stadium in the heart of London. The youths were more than anxious to attend the memorable event which they had been planning for years.

However, there was one major complication. As the Cultural Festival of India was also on-going at Alexandra Palace, the question arose that if the youths attended the Tula at QPR stadium, who would tend to the security of the festival grounds at Alexandra Palace? Swamishri gathered the youths in a special assembly and requested, "I wish that those who have been assigned a duty at the festival grounds stay there on duty and not come to the stadium. If Maharaj wishes, you will get a chance again in the future. All of us should put aside our wish to attend the celebration at the stadium and stay on duty here..."

Swamishri finished his blessings and immediately the youths responded with a long round of applause. When

Swamishri wishes something to be done, he never needs to push people to act in that way. His love is such that people agree naturally, of their own accord. No arguments or appeals. This is a telltale sign of an ideal leader.

Many leaders have an extremely repulsive habit of working by shouting. All too often, they resort to shouting to prove their authority and superiority. I distinctly remember that during Yogiji Maharaj's Amrut Mahotsav in Gondal, Swamishri handled all of the departments, single-handedly! Yet, never once did I see him tense, upset or angry.

After we returned from Yogi Bapa's last foreign tour in 1970, it was Pramukh Swami who was responsible for organizing the transportation arrangements for the sadhus and devotees travelling with Yogi Bapa. It was a very complicated and tense responsibility since there were always more people than facilities. Yet, I never saw Swamishri bored of his duty. He remained absolutely patient and stable while working. Others in his shoes would immediately resort to shouting. His *sadhuta* gleamed through as he deftly worked from behind the curtain, not letting people know of his adeptness in making appropriate arrangements.

Even if a man is made the leader of a small group of people, he resorts to bossing and bullying. What would happen, then, if he is given, as Maharaj says in Gadhada II-25, virtues equivalent to God's? Yet Swamishri has continued to serve others just as he did in his youth. How can God not be pleased with such humility?

To prevent the misconception that 'inactivity' is spirituality, Shriji Maharaj has defined 'inactivity' as performing activities for the sake of God and his sadhu. Swamishri has always been adept in working in this manner. While working, he trusts others and is able to make quick decisions. Yet, he has never put aside his vows.

He has never sacrificed *sadhuta* in the process. With his expertise, he has raised 'activity' to the heights of spirituality. He has given 'work' a spiritual flavour. On the other hand, many novices have claimed that spirituality can never allow 'activities'. Shriji Maharaj has clarified this point in Vachanamrut Gadhada II-11 by saying, "All activities of a non-believer are for pampering his senses, whereas all activities of a devotee of God are solely for serving God and his Sadhu. As a result, the devotee's activities are a form of bhakti."

Swamishri's presence makes actions holy and spiritual. Why? Because in whatever action he performs, God is always present. In our case, God comes and goes. In this respect, Swamishri is the ideal sadhu.

The Gita states "*Yoga karmashu kaushalam*" – Adeptness in actions is true Yoga. Swamishri's life is an embodiment of this statement. Let us learn from Swamishri's methods and resolve to work as he does with the only intent being to please God and his Sadhu. If we can do this much, nothing will be able to bind us and we will continue to enjoy more and more bliss, just like Swamishri.



7. SERENITY

Once in Akshar Bhuvan in Mumbai, Swamishri had met people for three hours continuously. Even after such a long and hectic session, when he came out of the room everyone witnessed an amazing sight, Swamishri's face was as fresh as ever, smiling and alert. He seemed as fresh as a person who has just enjoyed ten hours of deep, undisturbed sleep!

What was discussed while meeting people? Nothing but miseries and problems! Nothing but conflicts and distress. If we were in his place, we would feel, 'Why are you bringing your problems to me? Solve your own problems. What do you expect me to do about it?' Even if we only hear someone else's problems repeatedly we feel disturbed and tense. Swamishri, on the other hand, had heard and solved people's problems for three hours continuously! Still, he was so fresh and light! Of course, he hadn't merely listened to the problems; he had cared, counselled and loved. He had given patience and prayed. After all, his devotees are his life.

On one occasion, Swamishri was visiting all of the devotees' houses in Karcheliya during the scorching summer month of Vaishakh. When Swamishri arrived in one house, he was completely drenched with sweat. His upper garment had become completely wet. Sweat was also rolling down his forehead. At that time, the owner of the house informed Swamishri of a miraculous *murti* of Swamishri himself in the village from which water constantly oozed out. Many times, one could even fill an entire glass with the water. People flocked from all over to see the miracle. Swamishri, after hearing the story, wiped

the sweat from his own forehead, and said, "Ranchhodbhai, this is true sweat! This sweat will be much more useful than the miraculous water from the *murti*."

So many miracles occur in Swamishri's presence; so many blessings are fulfilled; God has heard his prayers; and yet, he has only one reply, "God is doing the work." Standing under the shelter of God and his guru, Swamishri is free from the heat of tensions and worries.

In 1985, in London, I was with Swamishri in his car as he was on his way to be honoured in the Suvarna Tula Mahotsav. During the short ride Swamishri was completely engrossed in reading letters. He read with patience, eagerness and absolute concentration. Most ordinary individuals, on their birthdays, would be over the moon. They would put minor chores aside and try to enjoy the day, especially if the chores are boring. But here is Swamishri – he read letters both on the way to the Tula Mahotsav and also immediately after, on his way back to the mandir! What do these letters contain? Certainly they are not letters of praise or appreciation. In fact, they are nothing more than cries of misery, problems and dilemmas. Yes, there were cards of congratulations for the Suvarna Tula Mahotsav, but Swamishri had pushed them aside. His only concern was that his devotees should receive replies and guidance as soon as possible. His pattern of thinking while dealing with letters is, 'How can I help my devotees?', 'How can I serve others?', 'How can I offer more and more devotion?' With thoughts as noble as these, how can there be room for boredom? Even in replying to letters, Swamishri is tensionless and carefree.

In 1977, in America, Swamishri had spent four continuous days and nights travelling. On some nights, he had to travel as many as 500 miles by road non-stop. Swamishri, with a rosary in his hand, would constantly chant the name of God; in addition, he would stay awake

to keep the driver company. After arriving at the destination, Swamishri would immediately bathe, perform his *puja* and hurry through breakfast. Afterwards, there would always be a long list of devotees who were waiting for Swamishri to consecrate their houses. Not a moment was left free for rest. Constant travelling!

On the fifth day, even after such a hectic programme, I have seen Swamishri's state with my own eyes – absolutely fresh and serene. Never have I seen him stretch to shake off laziness or even yawn! Tensionless, even in such extreme circumstances!

Swamishri is capable of sliding from one task to another effortlessly, needing no time off for rest or a break. The moment he returns from visiting devotees' houses, he starts another activity immediately, whether it be replying to letters or counselling people personally. In all ways and at all times he works for the good of others, never for his own personal benefit. In fact, the very purpose of his incarnation on earth is for the uplift of others.

Many times Swamishri looks to be idle. But even in that we see his naturalness and light attitude – never does he put on a false show to appear busy. No matter how many meetings or activities are on-going, he always seems at ease; always fresh and jovial. Believing responsibilities to be a form of devotion, he works with one thought in mind, 'How can I please God and my guru?'

Man has an inherent weakness in that as his level of knowledge increases, he tends to neglect devotion. He thinks to himself, 'Devotion is for beginners; knowledge and understanding are more important.' But I have seen Swamishri for years and never has he neglected worshipping God. Without fail, the moment his hands become free, he picks up his rosary and begins to chant the name of God. Once we had made a 24-hour journey by train from Delhi to Ahmedabad. I still remember how he

had turned the rosary continuously throughout the entire day. In those days, neither of us talked much. Hakabhai was also accompanying us. But as he had a talkative nature, he felt bored throughout the journey.

Tension can never allow concentration. We have seen Swamishri completely engrossed in all his daily activities. Whether it be offering devotion in his morning *puja* or having the darshan of the *murtis* of God in a mandir; whether he is listening to the reading of scriptures while eating or reading letters in an assembly – he can engage his mind in the activity at hand absolutely, without any disturbance due to distractions. A tense man can never experience such a state of single-mindedness.

Yes, there is one aspect where Swamishri never shows single-mindedness – in his own personal, bodily activities. Instead, he fixes his mind on God.

Once Swamishri had sat down to eat, but before beginning the meal, he attended a phone call from America. Immediately after the talk, he handed the phone to an attendant sadhu and put his hands over his pattar to have them washed. The sadhus had to literally remind him, "Swami, you haven't even begun to eat yet!" It was only after the sadhus reminded him did he realize that he hadn't eaten his meal!

Even when Swamishri retires at night, he seems fresh and lively. Unlike others at the end of a long, tiring day, we have never seen even a sigh of boredom or exhaustion.

Swamishri has a unique virtue in that he can meet people from all walks of life without the slightest hesitation. Whether to a small boy or an old man, rich or poor; no matter which caste or creed – Swamishri has made himself available to all. Many come to him to offer suggestions and some even aim to criticize. Many even intend to insult! Yet, Swamishri greets their animosity with love. Thousands have experienced his openness and accessibility.

Once in Bochasan, Swamishri had to scold a sadhu for a serious mistake. After the meeting, the sadhu got up and was leaving the room. But as his eyesight was weak, instead of turning the doorknob to open the door, he began pulling on the handle of a cabinet! On seeing this comical mistake, Swamishri exploded into laughter. On pondering over this incident, we realize that if Swamishri had really been angry, he would not have been able to laugh. Anyone else would have become even more angry, "Are you blind, or what?" But Swamishri's calm and tranquillity leave no room for anger or anxiety. In fact, if we experience peace and tranquillity by his mere darshan, imagine how much he himself must be experiencing!

Once Swamishri left the village of Majoth by bullock cart for Bhadra. Gnanprasad Swami was accompanying him. As it was difficult to see late at night, they took a wrong turning and instead of arriving at Bhadra, they reached a different village. Gnanprasad Swami said, "Bapa! You have really performed a *lila*! You must have wanted to consecrate this village by your presence and that is why you allowed us get lost."

Swamishri immediately began laughing at the whole mishap. The time was well past midnight. Anyone else would have become angry, but Swamishri remained light by laughing and downplaying the mistake.

Swamishri has always bowed down to others. He never finds it difficult to ask for forgiveness. In fact, he is ready to accept a mistake even if he is not the cause.

In 1987, Swamishri and 350 sadhus returned from a pilgrimage to various mandirs in North India. On returning, Swamishri received a letter from a man living in London. The man wrote that Swamishri should not have travelled with such a large entourage, complaining, "My trip to North India just happened to coincide with yours. Wherever we went we found it difficult to find

accommodation. You made both mine and my family's journey absolutely miserable."

Swamishri replied, apologizing, "Please forgive us for any inconvenience we may have caused you during your trip. If you had informed us, we would have definitely helped and arranged for your accommodation. Please do understand that we had no intention of troubling you or your family."

On one occasion Swamishri was in Bhadra. Some devotees from the village of Sevani had arrived to invite Swamishri to their village to consecrate the *murtis* in the village's Sanatan Mandir. It just so happened that the day of the event conflicted with Swamishri's programme in another village and so it was impossible for Swamishri to go. Swamishri told the devotees, "We will send Mahant Swami..." Thereafter, as if apologizing for not being able to come, he explained, "Tell everyone else in the village that we truly wanted to come but we not able to. Please do forgive us. We will definitely come sometime in the future."

Without even being at fault, Swamishri has the humility to utter such words! This would not be possible without destroying the ego of the self.

Swamishri is an expert at handling insults. In fact, he can be considered second to none in this field. But the question is, what thought process does he go through to cope with insults?

Does he view the insulting words as merely a lifeless part of space?

Does he think of the insult as merely a blow to the body, but not really to the self?

Does he think that the body is useless enough to deserve such treatment?

Does he not even register the insult due to his absorption in God?

Or does he think of God's glory, and, as a result, think

of insults as negligible?

These are all possibilities because they fit his pattern of thinking. But if we were to combine all of these thoughts into one word, it would be, serenity.

Swamishri experiences a state of freedom from tension 24-hours a day because he is forever engrossed in God's bliss. This tension-free state seems to have an encompassing effect over his entire personality, in each of his acts. Even in sleep he looks content and serene. His state is independent of objects, people and praise. In all conditions, at all times, he is resolutely one with God.

In order to associate with us, he has become human just like us. Hence, he may show all the qualities and quirks of humans; he has masterfully concealed his true divinity under the cover of human actions. As a result, the serene state which we do see in him is only the tip of the iceberg. The vastness of his true nature remains incomprehensible.

If we touch a bowl filled with ice cream we will definitely experience a cold sensation, but the sensation of the same ice cream in the mouth is far more gratifying. Our view of Swamishri from the outside is much like touching the bowl of ice cream.

This serenity has not originated from lack of responsibilities or from carelessness. It is not due to the fact that others do work for him and he remains idle. This peace of mind is not like the pleasure we get from gossiping or when we get a favourite item we had always desired. Swamishri's peace and serenity is completely different. The reason is that Swamishri is completely pure. He has no other desire but to please God and he believes God to be the all-doer. As a result, all his actions are pure, divine and filled with devotion.

d d d

What is worldliness? Simply put, worldliness is nothing

more than clashes of the ego. In society, ego is constantly boosted – then how can one experience bliss? If we stir a small pool of urine and faeces with a stick, we are bound to be bothered by the stench. Searching for bliss by amplifying one's ego is just like that. As long as there is ego, any serenity we experience is fake. Swamishri's serenity, though, is founded on the firm rock of humility. Nothing can shake it. Only a genuine man can experience such genuine peace!

Because Swamishri is a storehouse of serenity, anyone who comes into his contact also experiences serenity. They feel content, having experienced a feeling they have never experienced before. That is why thousands of people throng just to have his darshan.

Once in Mumbai, a man had come to meet Swamishri. During the course of the brief meeting, he explained to Swamishri, "Actually, I have only met you twice. But, after meeting you, I feel so light and at peace! Never before have I experienced this. By your blessings, even the problems at my factory have been solved..."

Swamishri responded, "We should always keep the company of God and his true Sadhu. They have nothing but bliss and happiness to offer."

Thousands have had similar experiences. It shows clearly that Swamishri has tuned himself perfectly with God and his bliss.

Once, in Houston, Pravinbhai asked Swamishri, "Despite the fact that your sadhus openly praise you in your presence, how do you manage to remain so humble?"

Swamishri replied, "Whatever we are, it is due to God. The question of ego arises only if we take the credit of our own virtues on our own head."

Pravinbhai asked, "When do you have this thought of God's doership?"

Swamishri replied immediately, "It never leaves my mind!"

Once Swamishri was honoured by the government officials of the city of Anand. During this assembly, one dignitary delivered a sparkling lecture in praise of Swamishri. At the end of the assembly, Swamishri opened his blessings with the following words, “Whatever words of honour you have uttered today are all in honour of God, because ultimately, he is our controller. Our duty is only to spread his message to as many people as we can. We must remain at his service...”

Swamishri’s speech was filled with humility and devotion. In general, all his talks are filled with the message of God’s greatness and our minuteness. Judging from the incidents in his life, we notice that believing God to be the all-doer is his monopoly.

The true test of a man’s understanding – that whatever God does is for our best – is during times of difficulty. And it is during these times that Swamishri’s inner conviction shines through. In 1974, Swamishri left Mumbai with great fanfare to fly to Nairobi. But for certain reasons, the government there refused to allow Swamishri to disembark from the plane. As a result, Swamishri had to return to India on the same plane. After returning, many of the sadhus in Swamishri’s entourage could not even face the devotees who had gathered at the Mumbai mandir. But Swamishri was carefree; at such an insulting moment, Swamishri explained to everyone that we haven’t done anything wrong; it must have been God’s wish that we return. At that time Swamishri brilliantly explained Vachanamrut Gadhada I-74 emphasizing the doership of God. Swamishri’s casual and playful tone in the explanation helped ease the tension, and all the sadhus and devotees in the audience were relieved from the shock of the incident.

Two or three years after assuming the guruship of the Sanstha after Yogiji Maharaj had reverted to Akshardham, Swamishri had travelled to a village named Kinkhlod. Here

Swamishri was to attend the opening ceremony of a motor pump in a farm. During the opening an old man pressed the switch of the pump, but unfortunately was shocked to death on the spot due to an electrical fault. Swamishri immediately chanted the Swaminarayan *dhun* to console the old man’s soul.

Just a few days later, Swamishri’s car was involved in a violent accident and the 15-year old son of our staunch devotee, Mahendrabhai of Dharmaj, was killed. Swamishri immediately chanted the Swaminarayan *dhun* and consoled the family members. He kept explaining that whatever happens is according to Maharaj’s wish; and whatever he wishes is for our best.

The above two incidents are important because at that time Swamishri had just become the guru of the Sanstha. After Yogi Bapa left, many found it difficult to accept Swamishri as the Pragat Satpurush. However, even during such trying times, Swamishri remained calm, patient and stable. All experienced that Swamishri had truly imbibed the understanding that nothing happens without the wish of God.

Never have we seen him depressed or pessimistic. Because he has attained the final knowledge of what is true and false in this world, he is unaffected by worldly relations or worldly praises. At times when any other human being would become tense and worried, Swamishri has always remained calm and serene.

In 1990, during an assembly at the Yuvak Mahotsav held in Vidyanagar, Swamishri was seated on stage in front of 21,000 youths. An eminent leader of the Bharatiya Janta Paksha (BJP), Shri L.K. Advani was seated alongside Swamishri. The summer heat was causing severe discomfort to everyone present. Even with the aid of two air coolers, Shri Advani was completely drenched with perspiration. Swamishri noticed this and immediately offered his own

towel. Shri Advani politely said no, but as Swamishri lovingly offered it again, he could not refuse. Swamishri didn't miss the opportunity to offer affection, even while 21,000 people were watching.

Just as a true mother engulfs her child with selfless love, Swamishri also greets everyone he meets with selfless love. He feels overjoyed to be helpful to someone, to please someone, to serve someone. In doing so, he completely forgets about his own bodily needs. By any means, he loves; he cares; he redeems.

In Mumbai, as per his usual routine, Swamishri began meeting people after breakfast. At that time, Swamishri noticed that Gopalsinh of Bilada, Rajasthan, was standing at the back of the room. Swamishri was delighted to see him and called him forward, "Oh, Gopalsinh! You have come!"

Viveksagar Swami asked, "Swami, you know him?"

Swamishri explained, "Of course! He used to lift Yogi Bapa's chair... He had really served Bapa well..." Swamishri embraced Gopalsinh and patting him on the back said, "It's good you have come. It has been a long time since we met."

Swamishri met Gopalsinh as a mother would meet a son after a long period of separation! He never misses a chance to praise someone else's spirit of service or his virtues. He cares and loves so subtly that the individual never even notices that Swamishri is serving me in some way. Everything is natural!

In the western world, people live by the philosophy that one should 'keep one's respect'. To many, a blow on one's self-respect is as bitter as death. Many times in fear of such a blow, a man feels a constant mental anguish. Also, he is not able to feel fearless and carefree. Swamishri is above the ego of the self and so he is completely free and at peace. Constantly engrossed in such a self-content state, how can there be any room for deceit or fraud? Instead, we find honesty and sincerity.

Once Swamishri was in Amalner in the state of Maharashtra. After performing the groundbreaking ceremony for the new BAPS mandir, Swamishri addressed the assembly in Hindi, "In order to build such a mandir, we need your help. All the possessions we have, have been given by God; ultimately, they are not our own. In fact, God has also made us. So, if we do something for God, we will experience peace and happiness. We will be redeemed. Nothing in the world can give us this – it is only God and his sadhu who can grant us these prized gifts."

Swamishri's Hindi may have sounded broken and grammatically incorrect, but because it came from an absolutely pure heart, it soothed and consoled everyone present.

d d d

How many people in the world have received as much praise and acclaim as Swamishri? He was appointed president of the Sanstha at the young age of 28; at the age of 51, he has become the guru of an international spiritual organization. Every year, his devotees hold a grand festival to celebrate his birthday. Hundreds of political leaders, both in India and in foreign countries, have acclaimed his work in public. In an effort to show gratitude for all he has done, his devotees have organized grand festivals to weigh him with gold and platinum. Both the British and the Canadian parliaments have honoured him and praised his work. Dignitaries from all over the world have applauded him openly in his presence.

Is it easy to digest such praise? Insults may be bitter, but they're not completely poisonous. Ego, on the other hand, is absolute poison. Once it has spread its effects within one's personality, no one can relieve one of the fatal effects. It's no wonder then that a thinker has said, "Glory is a poison that can be taken only in small doses." Praise in small doses may be digestible, but heaps and heaps of praise are impossible to

digest. Yet, Swamishri has managed to digest mountains of praise and still remain humble. The main reason is that his happiness is founded on God's bliss, not worldly pleasures. In praise or insult, he has never handled the situation himself – he has invariably handed the reigns over to God. Is it any wonder, then, that he is completely tensionless, carefree and serene?



8. DEVOTION

Our scriptures describe Ekantik Bhakti as a wonderful harmony of four fundamental virtues, *dharma*, *gnan*, *vairagya* and *bhakti*. When considered practically, in normal day-to-day life, each virtue supports and enhances another in some manner. That is why even Shriji Maharaj has propounded this form of *bhakti*. If we think about it, then, how can such a balanced approach to devotion allow any form of impurity? Where there is no impurity, there is bound to be serenity and peace. Swamishri is a master in the field of Ekantik Bhakti. His pure and balanced form of devotion has inspired thousands to a more devout way of life.

Swamishri engages in the darshan of the *murtis* of God and Harikrishna Maharaj with such love that even onlookers experience peace of mind. It seems that just his method of darshan creates a divine atmosphere. He relishes the moment as a hungry man, starved of food for a week, would enjoy the first morsel of his most favourite item. He has darshan as if he were meeting God face-to-face. He prays as if God were present in person before him to listen and reply. Of course, in keeping with his honest nature, he never makes a show or pretends to portray devotion. Only natural, inner devotion!

Once in Atladra, the *pujaris*, Brahmajivan Swami and Nishkampriya Swami, had beautifully adorned the *murtis* with various garments. In the central shrine, Maharaj was decorated to make it appear as if he were seated; Gunatitanand Swami was dressed in a sadhu's clothes; and Gopalanand Swami was dressed as a pandit. In the leftmost shrine, Harikrishna Maharaj was adorned as a

king; Narayan in a Kathiawadi fashion and Radhika as if from Rajasthan. After having the darshan of all of the *murtis*, Swamishri was extremely pleased with the *pujaris*' devotion.

Later, during breakfast, Swamishri asked a sadhu seated near him, "Did you see the *pujaris*' love for the *murtis*? What type of dress was Thakorji wearing?" The sadhu was unable to reply correctly, so Swamishri said, "Come on, why can't you remember? Didn't you have darshan completely and with full concentration? When we have darshan, we should observe with absolute single-mindedness." After saying that, Swamishri described the adornments of each of the *murtis* in the mandir in detail. All were convinced that Swamishri's method of darshan is truly matchless.

Swamishri has extreme love for Harikrishna Maharaj, whom he keeps with him wherever he goes. He doesn't believe him to be a mere *murti*, but God himself. He invariably maintains the thought that Harikrishna Maharaj is constantly with him. With so many activities going on simultaneously, an ordinary person would find it difficult to remain sane, much less constantly fix one's mind on God! Here we realize that Swamishri is so different from the rest!

Once in Kapadvanj, Mumbai, Swamishri was enjoying a few light moments while having his meal. The discussion turned to the topic of sadhus' names. Someone mentioned that in Ahmedabad, there are many 'swarups' – sadhus with 'swarup' as the latter part of their name – ie. Swamiswarup, Shreejiswarup, Anandswarup, Krishnaswarup...

Someone else mentioned, "Narayanswarupdas (Swamishri's initiation name) as well!"

Another sadhu said, "He can't be considered as an Ahmedabad-based sadhu."

Bhagwatcharan Swami seized the opportunity and asked Bapa, "Bapa! Of which region shall we call you?"

Swamishri replied after a few seconds of silence, "We are from Akshardham, where else?" All were pleased to hear this unique but true reply.

Shriji Maharaj has mentioned in Vachanamrut Gadhada I-32, that after performing all of the activities of the day, one should invariably return to worshipping God – his *katha*, his kirtans and his darshan. No matter what the situation and no matter what the time, Swamishri never forgets to offer devotion to God.

In 1987, during a tour of North India, Swamishri reached Uttar Kashi. From here, Swamishri proceeded to Gangotri, the scenic and serene source of the holy Ganga. On his return to Uttar Kashi, due to the excessive travelling, Swamishri was extremely tired. Yet, he asked someone to read a book describing the pilgrimage places around the Himalayas. Then, after a few light moments with the sadhus, Swamishri retired to bed.

It was well past midnight. Due to a slight murmuring noise, Swamishri's attendant sadhu, Narayancharan Swami, woke up, only to find Swamishri sitting up on his bed in a meditative posture – he was chanting the Swaminarayan mantra softly. Narayancharan Swami watched silently for a few minutes and then asked, "Don't you want to rest? Can't you sleep?"

Swamishri replied in a soft, yet spirited tone, "Narayancharan! This is such a serene location – I feel like doing bhajan all night long!" Even in the middle of the night, Swamishri's mind leans towards worshipping God.

d d d

Due to physical ailments, doctors have insisted that Swamishri should either cut down or not perform prostrations at all. Yet, Swamishri never misses an opportunity. Once in Bochasan, he expressed his wish to do

prostrations after having the darshan of Maharaj and Swami in the central shrine.

The attendant sadhu asked, “Why today?”

“Let’s go ahead and do them today...” Swamishri attempted to conceal his true reason.

“But you have already done them yesterday.”

Swamishri replied, “Yesterday we had done *dandvats* because it was our first day in Bochasan. Today is a new day; so shouldn’t we offer another round of *dandvats*?” Having revealed his reason, Swamishri prostrated to the *murtis*.

Internally, Swamishri maintains constant rapport with God; yet, externally he is always eager for darshan, *dandvats*, kirtans and *katha*. On top of all this, Swamishri has made even his daily, routine activities God-centred. Devotion is interwoven in every act of his life. Always and in all ways, he makes himself insignificant and God as the most significant. He becomes a mere instrument and God the ultimate doer. That is why Shriji Maharaj has shown his oneness with a sadhu of such understanding by saying in Vachanamrut Gadhada I-44, “I am such a sadhu.”



9. A PARAM EKANTIK SADHU

How many sadhus can you find in the world who can grace us with true inner peace? How many can give you absolute confidence that you will be able to conquer *maya*? How many can inspire unshakeable faith towards God in an aspirant? How many gurus are there in the world who can help you gain the conviction that after death, you will reach nowhere else but Akshardham?

There are many sadhus in the world. Many help us live a more moral and cultured life; some help us realize our inner faults; a few even help us turn our backward lives towards God. It is all well and good, but what about the fact that although one appears to be progressing, this snail-paced approach leaves the ultimate goal of life far, far away? Many spiritual ashrams throughout the world are fostering a more and more hypocritical attitude towards God-realization. How can such a spiritually incompatible perspective ever hope to guide us towards true enlightenment? Meditation, yoga, sadhana are all fine; but what about the fact that they fail to give complete inner conviction and contentment? These sadhanas may make one feel that one is living a spiritual life, but Shriji Maharaj asserts that even *ashtang yoga* fails to completely eradicate the ignorance of *maya*.

On the other hand, only the Param Ekantik Sadhu can show us the true and shortest path to liberation. Even the Shrimad Bhagvat asserts this fact when Lord Kapildev says to his mother,

*Prasangamajaram pasham-atmanaha kavayo viduhu;
Sa eva sadhushu kruto moksha-dwaram-apavrutam.*

“Love towards worldly objects is binding; but the same

love and attachment, when directed towards a true sadhu helps open the doors to liberation.”

Shriji Maharaj has also mentioned in Vachanamruts Gadhada II-54 and Vadtal-11 that in order to realize the Self and to realize God, attachment to such a Param Ekantik Sadhu is mandatory. In Vachanamrut Gadhada I-60, Shriji Maharaj mentions that only through an *ekantik* can one become *ekantik*. Ultimately, true and absolute liberation is possible only through such a Param Ekantik Sadhu.

In Vachanamrut Vadtal-3, Shriji Maharaj has talked about a sadhu who can be compared to the geothermal fire which resides beneath the ocean floor – although it stays amidst tonnes and tonnes of water, it doesn’t get extinguished. In addition, it also helps turn the salty ocean water into sweet water in the form of rain. Similarly, Swamishri lives in the world, but never has he allowed the world to live in him. Also, just like the geothermal fire under the ocean, Swamishri helps transform ‘salty’ lives into ‘sweet’ lives. By his magical touch, two villages in Saurashtra – Odarka and Kukad – forgot their mutual hatred and grudges which had been handed down from generation to generation for 200 years! From the Koli Patels in the tribal areas of Selvas to the feuding Darbars of Saurashtra; from the fishermen of South Gujarat to the Gujaratis and Indians who have settled in foreign lands – Swamishri’s contact has uplifted countless downtrodden lives.

By his association, thousands have been saved from the filthy mud of vices and addictions; so many have been freed from the burning chains of hatred and revenge; countless have been relieved of the constant agonies of family turmoil. In addition to these outer benefits, Swamishri has helped people gain conquest over their inner enemies – ego, lust, greed, jealousy, etc. The very

same innate instincts which the rishis had tried to conquer with countless death-defying sadhanas, people have conquered merely by opening up to Swamishri and following the prescribed atonement for their mistake.

Today, young children, new-age youths and even atheists come to Swamishri. They all receive equal love and gain his friendship. People from all walks of life, of all ages, of all backgrounds, of all levels – all gain boundless inspirations from Swamishri. Even the downtrodden find a new hope in life after coming into contact with Swamishri. Through him, they find the strength and insight to pierce through the perplexities of their problems. Swamishri transforms lives – he is the Param Ekantik Sadhu.

Gunatitanand Swami has said, “If a true God-realized Sadhu is attained and one does as he says then the failings that would have taken tens of millions of births to overcome are overcome today and one becomes *brahmarup*” (Swamini Vato: 1-119). He has also mentioned, “God’s abode cannot be obtained even after tens of millions of years, but is attained by merely folding one’s hands to such a God-realised Sadhu” (Swamini Vato: 1-121).

Swamishri’s generous and loving character has changed the very definition of a sadhu. His neglect of caring for his own physical body, his active life despite old age and his enthusiasm in helping society show that he has risen above being self-centred into the higher plane of being others-centred. Thousands of people, who generally distrust sadhus and sometimes even fear them, come to Swamishri repeatedly. Whereas they would feel reserved with other sadhus, with Swamishri they feel at home.

In Swamishri’s heart, everyone is welcome. Here there is no neglect. There is no criticism or hatred. In Swamishri’s mind everyone is important. In his presence, you will fail to find even a trace of ego. He can accept all without any prejudice. Anyone who has even attempted to

walk on the spiritual path realizes the difficulty of such attainments. Realistically, such noble virtues are possible only in a genuine sadhu.

Swamishri meets thousands of people; still, he doesn't neglect even the smallest child. His manners are modern; but his ideals are traditional – in harmony with the teachings of the ancient Vedas and other Hindu scriptures. His powers are infinite; yet his humility is second to none! So far apart are these extremes that he remains an enigma to thousands throughout the world – “Is such a man of flesh and blood possible in today's frenzied society?”

True character is like gold. No matter how much one decorates and adorns brass, it can never become gold. Similarly, deceit and fraud can never take the place of pure character. *Sadhuta* can be faked, but in Swamishri one will find only pure character, only genuineness. Swamishri has adopted the *sadhuta* of the Gunatit lineage, not its outer behaviour. In fact, his *sadhuta* sprouts from deep within his inner self. It is nothing but pure, unalloyed gold – gold, gold and more gold!

Despite such a pure and lofty character never has he resorted to the whip-and-chair approach to refine others' behaviour. Despite his towering spiritual status, never does he feel others to be low, useless, immoral or even ordinary. When he preaches, he always adjusts according to our moods and capacities. His counsel is always soft, well-mannered and affectionate. Yes, he may need to criticize, but it is always loving and easy to swallow. Never has he attempted make his speech dramatic or artificial. Never has he thought, 'Let me teach these people a lesson.' Nor has he resorted to using fear to lead. He has never used his speech to make sarcastic remarks. His voice is always loving, caring, compassionate and blissful. He never misses a chance to praise, appreciate and congratulate. Humility and loving devotion to God are evident in every word he

utters and in every action he performs.

Never has he maintained arrogance of being a sadhu; nor has he entertained any egotistical thoughts of his own virtues. He has never tried to make a show of his character. Despite being so great, he has always mixed and mingled freely with others. He portrays himself as a fellow traveller, walking alongside of us instead of ahead of us.

Swamishri has so much faith in the *murtis* of God and in mandirs that he performs the simplest of acts with absolute devotion. For him, God has ceased to be a mere metaphysical entity and has become a reality – he sees God everywhere and in everything!

Throughout Swamishri's day, countless incidents take place – all are worthy of note. When we read through these notes, we ourselves begin to feel happy and content. How many religious leaders are there in the world whose day-to-day activities are recorded with such precision? If there are some, how many create as much of a lasting impact as Swamishri's life? Each moment of Swamishri's life is like gold – not a single moment should be left out.

Looking honestly at the above virtues, who else in this world can even compare with Swamishri? With such absolute purity, how can God choose not to reside in his heart?

Gunatitanand Swami has said that the very God and Sadhu who cannot be attained even after performing countless austerities, even after observing countless vows, even after chanting the name of God millions of times, even after millions of *yagnas*, even after donating millions – that very same God and Sadhu we have attained easily and effortlessly. We have said and read these words many times but we haven't thought over them. As a result, they haven't created a lasting impact in our lives and so we don't feel elated at the sheer inconceivability of our luck. The talks which have been mentioned in the scriptures

aren't mere games or play. We must learn to think over these words! We don't need to find any new thoughts, but we must learn to dive deeper into the thoughts which have been given in our scriptures. When one learns such wisdom, one's attachment and love towards God and his sadhu becomes imperishable.

Yes, if we aim to realize Swamishri's honesty and purity in all its glory, we must first become honest and pure! Any thoughts we entertain besides thoughts of pleasing God and his Sadhu is dishonesty and impurity. For a devotee, such negative thoughts are the very definition of sin. Ultimately, any dishonesty we do entertain is due to our ego. The desire for praise has misled countless aspirants from the true path. Shriji Maharaj has said that many times we offer even devotion with an aim to fulfil our ego. In fact, working without ego is many times more bitter than death.

Swamishri is a God-realized sadhu. But even if a newcomer doesn't have such knowledge, he will definitely feel Swamishri to be a pure and divine personality. Often, just his touch gives a divine experience. So many have felt that on meeting Swamishri for the first time in their lives, they realize that never before have they met such a man and never before have they had such an experience!

A young boy from Canada, Sanjay Rameshbhai Patel, had once written me a letter. Due to western influence, he wasn't familiar with our traditions in Satsang. Once, it so happened that he had gone for darshan of Swamishri's puja. He writes in his letter,

"After studying the scene, I was very surprised. On one side, Swamishri was performing puja. On the other side, people were walking in and out; some people were singing devotional songs; others were talking among themselves... It all seemed like havoc. But Swamishri! He imprinted the *tilak* and *chandlo* on his forehead, closed his eyes and

calmly engaged himself in meditation. I was totally dazed. Swamishri meditated with such serenity that it seemed he had forgotten everything around him. Only God and himself! Nothing else! The whole scene seemed so honest and genuine... After this experience, I have begun to do Satsang regularly. I never miss *bal sabha*. I really enjoy it..."

Incidents such as these are proof of Swamishri's divinity.

Once a sadhu read Vachanamrut Gadhada I-63. In it, Shriji Maharaj talks about how millions of universes are contained in one particle of Akshar, etc. – talks which are difficult to swallow and test the imaginative powers of even the greatest scientists. The sadhu once told me, "Whenever I hear or read such facts, my mind remains neutral. Sometimes I even ignore the fact without judging. For such fantastic talks, I neither have faith nor do I have distrust. But, whenever I have Swamishri's darshan, I feel that those facts must be true! His purity tells my heart that they cannot be make-believe!" Without us realizing it, the honesty in Swamishri's speech, actions and thoughts must be convincing countless others in a similar manner. Just on seeing Swamishri, we become convinced that God exists; we feel that God is present here and now on earth – in front of us! We also gain confidence and security that it is possible to realize God. By coming closer to Swamishri, we gain faith in spirituality.

After discussing these virtues of a Param Ekantik Sadhu, what else need we say? Even Nishkulanand Swami had experienced a similar dilemma:

*"Eva Sant shiromani, ghani ghani shi kahu vat;
Tevu nathi trilokma, sant sam tulya sakshat."*

"What else can I say about such a Sadhu? He cannot be compared with anything else in all the worlds put together."

In the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj has given an analogy, that due to her association with the king, a queen has as much authority as the king. Similarly, a Gunatit Sadhu, because of his association with God, has as much authority as God. Today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has the same powers as Shriji Maharaj – because Maharaj is present in him from head to toe. Maharaj sees through his eyes; Maharaj walks through his feet. That is why Nishkulanand Swami has said, “*Sant te swayam Hari...*” (The true Ekantik Sadhu is God himself).

“Having the darshan of such a sadhu is equivalent to having the darshan of God. Offering *seva* to such a sadhu is equivalent to offering *seva* to God. This is who we have attached ourselves to. Really, our fortune knows no bounds...” If these words of Gunatitanand Swami settle in our minds, nothing in the world can make us miserable.

In Mumbai, a young boy named Nilkanth once asked Swamishri, “Is God within you?” Swamishri replied without hesitation, “Of course, that’s why we’re sitting here!”



10. FROM VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES

Imagine Swamishri has just landed at a foreign airport. As his manner of dress stands out from the rest, he draws attention. Soon, he becomes an object of curiosity for all around. Some merely have a glance. Some are so busy and lost in their work that they fail to even take notice. Some see him, but show no reaction. Some manage a thought or two, ‘He seems to be a sadhu of some type...’ Some pause for a while, and think, ‘Who is he? Where is he from?’ Some even draw their own conclusions, ‘He must be a sadhu from India.’ Some become a bit more curious and bother to ask someone. Some inquire in detail and are pleased to know the facts. Some may even view him with contempt, ‘What is he doing here in our land? Why can’t he stay in his own country?’ And if the person has had a bitter experience with saffron before, many times he generalizes his bitterness towards all sadhus. One rotten apple causes suspicion on all good apples.

Many well-wishers – no matter which faith they affiliate to or which guru they bow to – find the heart to appreciate Swamishri’s work and efforts. Sometimes, they even offer a helping hand. A few others view Swamishri neutrally – they neither appreciate nor scorn. Some people realize him to be a sadhu from the Swaminarayan faith. Some even know him to be from the Bochasan Sanstha. Many even know him by name – as Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Some view him as an ideal disciple of God; some as an ideal sadhu in today’s society; some as a moulder of character and a preserver of culture. Some see in him a spirited leader of an international religious organization. Some become his disciples; some become full-time members

of the Sanstha and offer their services for its cause; a few brave men even dedicate their entire life by becoming sadhus of the Sanstha. Some view him as the key to redemption; some see in him Shriji Maharaj himself.

Of course there are also those who out of hatred and jealousy, scorn Swamishri. Sometimes these people know him to be a thousand times better than themselves, and still they scorn!

In this manner, each individual has a different viewpoint towards Swamishri. Perspectives of him may be endless, but Swamishri is one. He is the ideal Sadhu. He houses Shriji Maharaj perfectly, in all his glory.

Throughout history, especially in India, thousands of *yogis*, *rishis*, *maharshis*, *yatis* and *siddhas* have come and gone. Sadhus and sanyasis of all types of beliefs fill the world even today. Each may have their own path, but their goal is one – to reach God. Even Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsis, Muslims, Jains and Christians aim for the same goal; even they search for everlasting peace and tranquillity. Some travellers on the path are searching for direction; some are walking, but totally in the wrong direction! Some are tired of the journey, some have lost hope, some have been deflected by petty pleasures. Of course, there are the lucky few who have reached their destination – at long last. **These people have had to travel to their spiritual destination; Swamishri has always been there!** His virtues have not been developed, but are in-built. His relationship with God is eternal.

Indians have always viewed sadhus with respect. People literally worship them. Devout Hindus are even willing to sacrifice something for them. But we find that many times fakes misuse the benevolence of people to fulfil their own selfish motives. In this sense, we find that the general public is too gullible to tell truth from deception. Many times, when a foreigner has reached the frustration

limit of materialism and has nowhere to turn, so-called ‘yogis’ have always been present to take advantage of the situation. Packaging their schemes with an appealing eastern mysticism, these ‘yogis’ ruin their own lives, and, in addition, misguide thousands of others causing them frustration.

Totally opposite to these fakes is Pramukh Swami Maharaj! So highly respected in the world, yet absolutely humble, pure, open and selfless! Without any concern for his own body, he has totally sacrificed his life for the good of others. Many gurus give, but they also take – usually in the form of fulfillment of their own ego. But Swamishri has only one goal – to give, give and give. Nothing to take!

Once Swamishri said to his sadhus in Sarangpur, “I feel like doing so much for you; I cannot even express it in words...” In fact, what has Swamishri not done for us? Not a single devotee or sadhu is unfamiliar of Swamishri’s self-sacrifice for the world. Everyone has seen it and many have even personally experienced it.

As an ideal sadhu, he has maintained eight-fold celibacy and doesn’t even touch money. Bhagwan Swaminarayan, in his youth, studied the scriptures, travelled the length and breadth of India, met sadhus and sanyasis everywhere, and after having seen the pitfalls, realized that these two – women and wealth – are the principal source of corruption in a sadhu’s life. That is why he insisted on strict eight-fold *brahmacharya* to aid a sadhu’s journey to God-realization. Without this discipline, there is always the danger of being deflected from the path. Swamishri has maintained these two vows with perfect precision, not allowing a single lapse in their practice. Even though he is the leader of an international organization with thousands of disciples, he has never thought about women nor has he thought of keeping money.

Once in Vidyanagar various dignitaries had gathered in

Swamishri's presence. During the course of the conversation, one renowned dignitary who respected Swamishri highly, suggested that Swamishri should talk to women in order to spread Satsang more effectively. He mentioned, "It is understandable not allowing other sadhus to speak to women, but for Swamishri it is perfectly fine." Swamishri replied instantly, "Look, sir! This is a sadhu's personal matter. You are highly intelligent, experienced and respectable; but in this matter you simply won't understand. We have no desire to spread Satsang at the cost of our vows. If this means that no one will come to Satsang, we will sit in one corner and worship God. Our vows come first." Actually, the dignitary was right in that Swamishri, even if he does mingle with women, will never be affected the least bit. However, if he begins to lax, the other sadhus are bound to follow in the guru's footsteps. Ultimately, the corruption which would ensue would spoil the purity of Satsang.

In many places in the world, the guru and the disciples have a mutual hush-hush relationship – each one hides the other's shortcomings. When I think over this fact, I cannot help but feel how lucky we are to have found a pure guru like Swamishri. Truly, such a sadhu is extremely rare in today's world. He is compassionate; he cares for us; he nurtures us; he guides us forward through the intricacies of life. His life is pure! Just thinking over our fortune is a hair-raising experience. We have found him and he has found us!

The spiritual journey is extremely intricate, complex and unfamiliar for all of us. Millions throughout the world are striving to make that journey, each taking his own path according to his own knowledge and intuition. Everyone acts according to his own preconceived concepts of what is right and wrong. How many bother to ask if they are on the right path or not? If they do bother, who

do they ask? One can see outer riches, but how does one see if a guru is internally rich? How do we know he is experienced and can guide us properly? In actuality, there is no cause for concern because a true sadhu like Swamishri is obtained only after performing countless good deeds in countless previous births. Having obtained such a sadhu, it takes even more fortune to be able to have the awareness to recognize him. These talks, which also have scriptural authority, aren't mere manipulations, neither are they well-conceived logical arguments; nor are they just intellectual gymnastics. Truly, having found and recognized Swamishri, our luck knows no bounds!

Once in Anand, a professor from an agricultural college had come to meet Swamishri. He showed Swamishri a new type of mango which he had just bred. Swamishri praised his efforts. In the end, the professor mentioned to Swamishri that although this new hybrid was unique, no one was able to understand him, "Only you seem to have understood me."

Swamishri replied, "Sir, I am in the same situation as you. No one understands me either!"

There is nothing more important in Satsang than learning to understand Swamishri as he really is.

All scriptures, when discussing the issue of liberation, ultimately point towards a true sadhu as its only means. Without his aid, using our own intelligence and might to attain redemption is like trying to cross an ocean by swimming. Brahmanand Swami was an extremely sharp *paramhansa* of Shriji Maharaj. But when he asked Maharaj the question of how useful *atmanishtha* is in attaining *moksha*, Maharaj completely dismissed the idea and replied that except for faith in God, nothing else will help.

Whether we realize it or not, inconceivable work is being done just by our being in Swamishri's presence and

by surrendering ourselves to him. Even if someone merely appreciates him and his work, there are countless benefits, because this seemingly simple, straightforward, ordinary sadhu is greater than even the greatest. He is extremely powerful, extremely pure and extremely divine.

Yogi Bapa used to repeat, “Always be in high spirits. Don’t let the bliss of having obtained God decline for even a second. If we realize this much, we will have nothing more to realize; we will have nothing more to do.” He often called it *prapti no kef* – the ecstasy of attainment!



11. GIFTS

If there were no trees on this earth, the human race would have become extinct a long time ago. Trees take in carbon dioxide gases from the atmosphere and introduce valuable oxygen into the air. They take in poison and give us life. Without trees, our planet’s ecological balance would be so disturbed, life would be impossible in any form. Seen in this light, a tree is invaluable to our existence; we can never put a price tag on a tree. Yet, they have been given to us absolutely free. Just like trees, a true sadhu is invaluable for our existence on earth. He takes in poison in the form of our troubles and gives us nectar in the form of character and morality. He is needed everywhere by everyone.

Once, as part of a study, the genealogy of a prisoner in a British jail was examined. After much research, it was found that he belonged to the lineage of a couple married 400 years ago. Besides this fact, the research revealed an amazing discovery. Among the descendants of that couple, 1200 were crooks and all had been jailed! Now suppose that that couple had not met 400 years ago. If they hadn’t met and married, the world would have been saved from 1200 crooks!

On our holy soil of India, what if villains such as Ravan, Kans and Shishupal had not been killed? What if the great avatars, like Ram and Krishna, and great sages had not appeared on earth? If so, the world would have been filled with demonic people. That is why holy men have been invaluable to society.

The greatest gift sadhus have given to society is the establishment of values and virtues. By their own example,

they have instilled faith in God, faith in the scriptures, faith in religion and faith in mankind. Nowadays, even sociologists and psychologists are beginning to agree that re-establishment of basic values are the need of the hour in our burning societal structure. If sadhus had not repeatedly re-established these values, humanity and culture would have been completely wiped out from the face of the earth. To our great fortune, each era has been graced by a great soul who reunites and mends the cracking pieces of our world. Today, we see Pramukh Swami Maharaj fulfilling that role to perfection. Dr. Radhakrishnan, an eminent Indian philo-sopher, has put it nicely, "Our living today is not due to scientific discoveries alone, but to sadhus who constantly roam through society, uplifting the world."

Throughout history, sages such as Vashishta, Valmiki, Shukji, Naradji, etc. have always kept the holy land of India alive and breathing. Whether from the East or from the West, sadhus have spoken in one voice: Live a pure and noble life.

In some sense, a sadhu works much like rain – he delivers man from the scorching heat of desires, hatred, anger and jealousy. His soothing touch, his serene darshan and his blissful voice relieve us of the heat of misery. In fact, just his darshan is enough to purify us. History has witnessed thousands of cases of menacing sinners who have been transformed and purified by a sadhu's holy contact. How is this possible? Because a sadhu has constant rapport with God. He draws his power directly from the very source of all power – God!

Association with a sadhu melts the ego and creates a divine and pious atmosphere. The true sadhu becomes magnetic – drawing people from all walks of life towards his shelter. Today, princes, millionaires, scholars, intellectuals, political leaders, children, youths, teachers,

professors and people from all over the world come to meet Swamishri and receive his blessings. Invariably, all experience some new inspiration by his contact. He has given thousands the warmth of hope and the will to live a noble life. In doing so, he has never needed to resort to magic or miracles. Actually, the transformations he has made and the values he has instilled are miracles in themselves.

There is a tremendous difference between youths and Swamishri! Swamishri is highly spiritual, youths are highly flamboyant. Swamishri is not educated, youths receive the most modern knowledge in today's schools and universities. Swamishri is old, youths are in the prime of their lives. Swamishri is extremely detached from the world, youths are extremely attached. And yet, he has somehow managed to channel youth energy towards devotion – puja, *seva*, worship, prayers, etc. He has made youths spiritual. He has made youths humble. What else can we call this but a miracle?

Swamishri is the embodiment of benevolence. He has taken so much care and concern for devotees' personal problems that countless families have been rescued from the verge of ruin. So many have saved so much in terms of legal fees. His advice is always practical and to the point. Never has he thought of cheating anyone. In dealing with others, 'Let go', 'Sacrifice', 'Let's do it your way' have always been his mottoes. His helpfulness in times of dire need have solved even the most complicated and confusing of problems. Through his example, people have learned to live in harmony, honestly, affectionately and nobly.

Former President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, once said, "The greatest, the noblest and the highest contribution a man can make for the benefit of mankind is his pure and spotless character." Swamishri has given the world the gift of character. In fact, his message

to the youths of the world is exactly this, “Become virtuous and create a virtuous society.” To fulfil this goal, Swamishri himself is the goal; he is the means; and he is the way. Although there are no schools which teach character-development as a course, Swamishri can be considered a walking, talking university of character! What one cannot learn by reading countless books one can learn by his mere company.

Consider Swamishri’s efforts in the field of de-addiction. To this day, Swamishri has inspired many thousands of people to become free from the shackles of cigarettes, alcohol, tobacco, etc. Through this, society has benefited by saving millions and millions of dollars, without even considering priceless intangible benefits such as health and family unity.

Whether it be in the field of education or in famine; whether it be in an earthquake disaster or a flood – the quality of Swamishri’s social work has exceeded all known standards. In fact, his efforts have set an ideal for others to follow. And he has managed to get all this work done on a purely voluntary basis!

In one of his kirtans, Muktanand Swami has referred to a revealing universal truth:

*“Rājābhi dukhiyā rankbhi dukhiyā,
dhanpati dukhit vikārme;
Vinā vivek bhekh sab dukhiyā,
Juthā tan ahamkārme.”*

“The kings in the world are miserable; the beggars are too. The rich are lost in thirst (for more wealth); even sadhus weep without wisdom. O Uddhav! In the end, it is all due to the ignorance of believing oneself to be the body.”

Muktanand Swami’s insight 200 years ago is just as applicable today. The reasons for misery may have changed, but as long as we keep desires, misery will refuse

to abandon us.

Those who have enough to eat have digestion problems; those who are capable of digesting don’t have enough to eat! Even people with cars and bungalows all too often spend their lives in a state of mental poverty. Why? Desires. Thinkers, and now even scientists, agree on the fact that you are nothing more than your mind. People feel defeated, depressed or hopeless because their minds have been defeated. Our minds have been spoiled. And when we continue to watch, hear, read, think and eat in a manner which further spoils the mind, how can we ever hope to annihilate our desires and ignorance? How can our souls find peace? Swamishri often says, “Only when the mind is stabilized will we be able to attain peace.”

To help us conquer our mind, Swamishri has given us divine wisdom through spiritual discourses; he has given *seva* in the form of organizing grand festivals, both in India and abroad; he has given vows which form a border of protection against evils.

In this way, Swamishri has made thousands of people happy by leading them to God. His sober face, compassionate vision, sweet and loving speech, his sparkling eyes, his divine personality – we have attained him all too easily! Just by coming near him, criminals, ordinary men and even spiritually lofty sadhus feel peace of mind; they attain the stability which they seek; they attain wisdom; ignorance is destroyed and a divine fragrance of love fills the atmosphere. In his presence, we gain true wisdom.

These are Swamishri’s gifts – clear and effective, significant and lasting, invaluable and incomparable.



12. LEARNING FROM SWAMISHRI

This has been my account of Swamishri, as I have seen and experienced him. After having examined him in much detail, we must now examine ourselves. What can I learn from Swami?

So, as a grand finale, let us look at the principles which are both dear to him and have been imbibed by him; principles which can make our life as pure and pious as his; principles which can enlighten us after having lived countless lives in utter darkness:

- Work with absolute honesty – with others and with oneself. Brass, no matter how decorated or shiny, is still brass; it can never match gold. Gold, on the other hand, no matter how old and deformed, is still gold. Similarly, deceit, fraud and manipulations can never inspire inner devotion; God will never be pleased; nor will we experience peace of mind. If, on the other hand, we offer pure, unalloyed and honest devotion, God and his Sadhu will surely be pleased and we will surely find peace.
- Work only with the aim to please and attain God – not to fulfil worldly desires.
- Always fill one's work with the fragrance of *sadhuta* – saintliness.
- Never waste a single second of time. Use time to help others or in devotion to God.
- Cultivate unflinching faith in God and guru, and always remain humble, honest and sincere towards them.
- Always believe God to be the all-doer. This way we gain strength to overcome the ups and downs of life. Never fret over miseries which may befall us.

- Live a pure life so as not to transgress the commands of God and his holy Sadhu, and one's *upasana*.
- Draw strength from God, and only God, not from one's own efforts of achievements.

This is enough – enough to begin living a life like Swamishri's.

After saying so much, I still feel I have not said enough. Why? Swamishri is so vast and we are so insignificant! He is an ocean of virtue and we are filled with flaws. After all, to understand him and know him completely isn't child's play. Nonetheless, what we have discussed is enough to help begin to understand him.

Finally, let us pray:

O Swami! Only you can help us understand you. Please give us the wisdom to see you as you really are. Please take our hands and guide us so that we may, in the end, attain Akshardham and enjoy the bliss of Purushottam.



GLOSSARY

antaryami	‘inner knower’. Power of God to reside within a jiva, ishwar, etc.
asans	postures
atma	the pure <i>jiva</i> distinct from the physical, subtle and causal bodies,
atmabuddhi	intense affection
atmanishtha	the conviction that one is <i>atma</i>
bal sabha	children’s assembly
bawa	an ascetic, see also <i>vairagi</i> .
bheeda	hardships
brahmacharya	celibacy
brahmand	universe
brahmarup	possessing qualities similar to Brahman
chandlo	auspicious vermilion mark applied on the forehead
dal	spicy soup of dissolved pulses
dandvat	prostration
dharna-parna vrat	a form of austerity in which a waterless fast is observed on alternate days
dhun	chanting of God’s name
ekantik	having fully developed the characteristics of dharma, <i>gnan</i> , <i>vairagya</i> and bhakti in one’s life, together with a true understanding

ekantik dharma	of God’s greatness collective term for dharma, <i>gnan</i> , <i>vairagya</i> and bhakti
farari	foods edible on day of Ekadashi e.g. tubers such as potatoes, cassava, <i>suran</i> , dairy products, fruits, nuts, tomatoes, cabbage, <i>dudhi</i> (gourd), and some forms of grain – <i>morio</i> , <i>rajagro</i>
gnan	knowledge; also often used to mean atma-realization
guna	qualities
jholi	a cloth tied or sewn at opposite corners to use as a bag
jiva	soul with worldly desires
kanthi	double-threaded necklace, usually made of tulsi beads, received by <i>satsangis</i> upon initiation into the Satsang fellowship, and worn as a sign of their affiliation to God
katha	spiritual discourse
kothari	administrative head of a mandir
kumkum	vermilion powder
lila	the actions of God and the God-realized Sadhu which are believed to be always divine
maharshis	great rishis
manushyabhav	to attach human attributes and failings to God and his Sadhu

maya	ignorance, material universe, darkness. One of the five eternal realities. Anything that deviates one from the worship of God
moksha	liberation; deliverance of the <i>jiva</i> from the cycle of births and deaths and attainment of God's divine abode
muni	holy man
murti-pratishtha	consecration of <i>murtis</i> in a mandir
murti	idol of God
nirlobh	vow of non-covetousness
nirman	vow of humility
nishkam	vow of absolute celibacy
nissneh	vow of detachment
nisswad	vow of non-taste
padhramani	visit by sadhus to sanctify a home
panch vartman	five vows of Swaminarayan ascetics
paramhansa	the highest order of ascetics
parshad	renunciant wearing white robes
pattar	wooden bowl for eating
potlu	a piece of cloth used as a bag
pranayam	yogic breathing exercises
puja	worship ritual
pujari	the priest of a mandir who performs the necessary rites and rituals
rishi	a sage or seer
rotli	thin, soft, circular unleavened bread of wheat flour
sadhak	a person endeavouring on the spiritual path

sadhuta	saintliness
satpurush	the Sadhu who has a constant rapport with God, the Gunatit Sadhu.
satsangi	member of the Satsang fellowship. One who practises <i>satsang</i> .
sattvagun	quality of goodness
seva	service
sevak	one who serves
shangar arti	second <i>arti</i> of the day, performed after breakfast has been offered and the <i>murtis</i> have been adorned with garments, ornaments and garlands
shibir	conferences, training camps
shikharbaddh	mandir in which five <i>artis</i> are performed daily and daily worship is performed by sadhus
siddha-purush	a God-realized person
swarup	form
swarupnishtha	conviction in the true form of God
tilak	the U-shaped mark applied to the forehead with sandalwood paste. It symbolizes the holy feet of God. The <i>chandlo</i> is applied in the middle of it
upasana	knowledge that God is supreme, the all-doer, always has a divine personality and is ever present on earth in human form
vachansiddh	one whose words come true
vad	dark half of lunar month

vairagya	detachment; an aversion or strong, persistent dislike for the world and its pleasures
vishays	worldly pleasures
yagna	a ritual offering performed with the purpose of achieving a particular desire
yati	a celibate
yogi	ascetic
yuvak	youth

